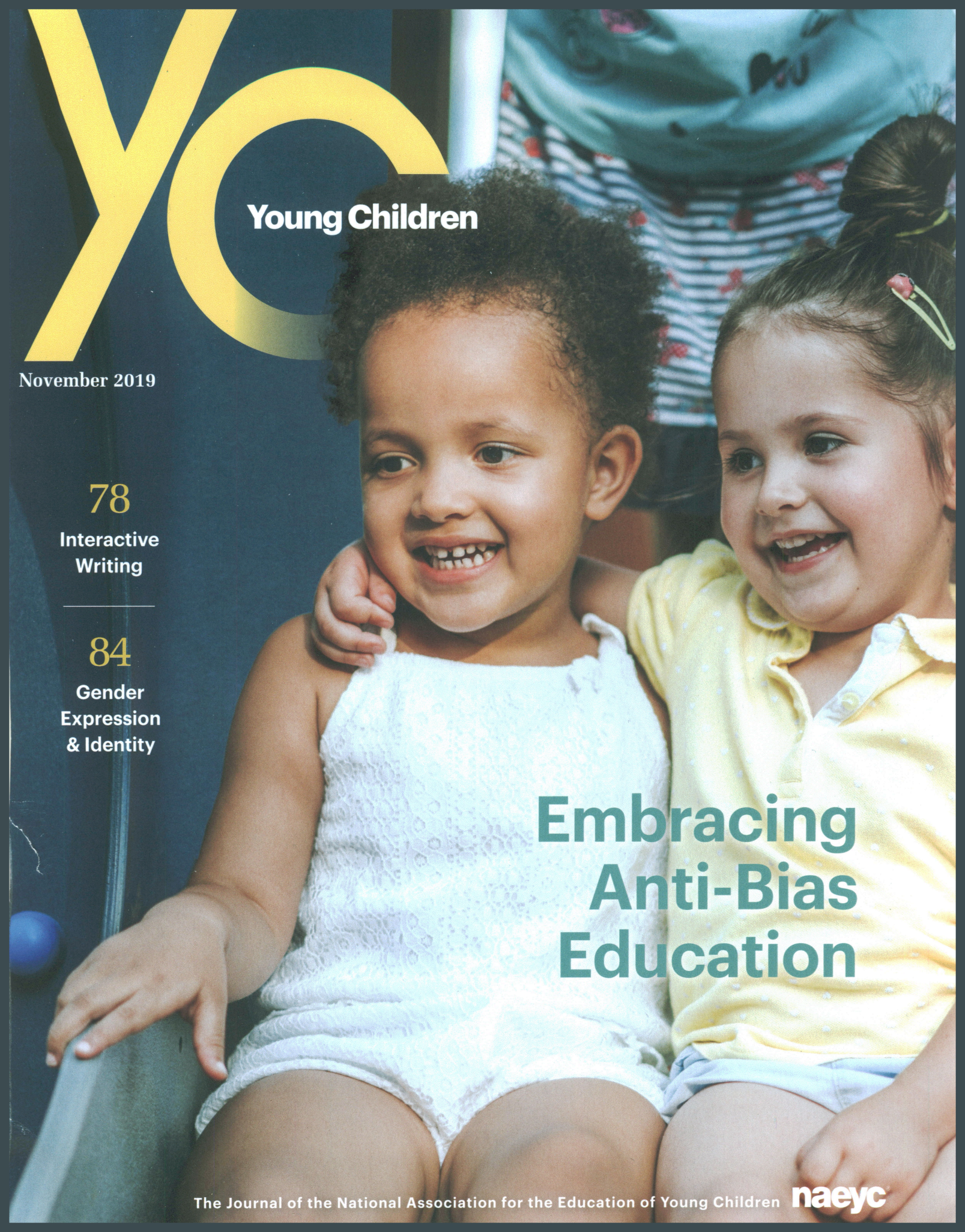

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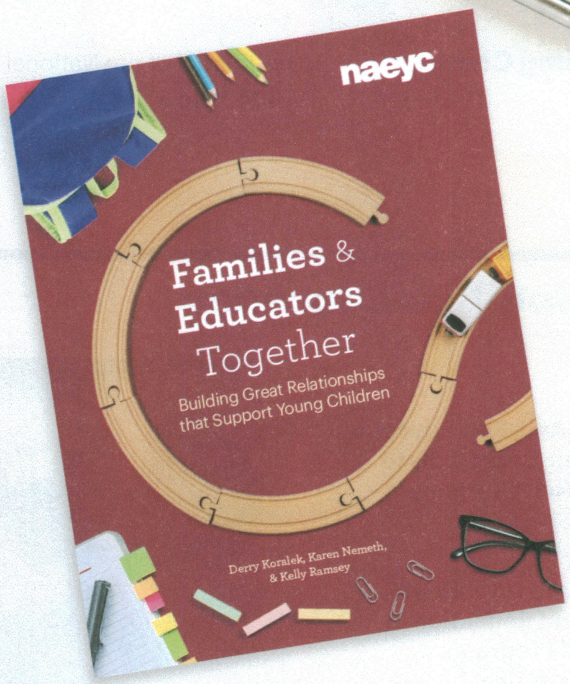

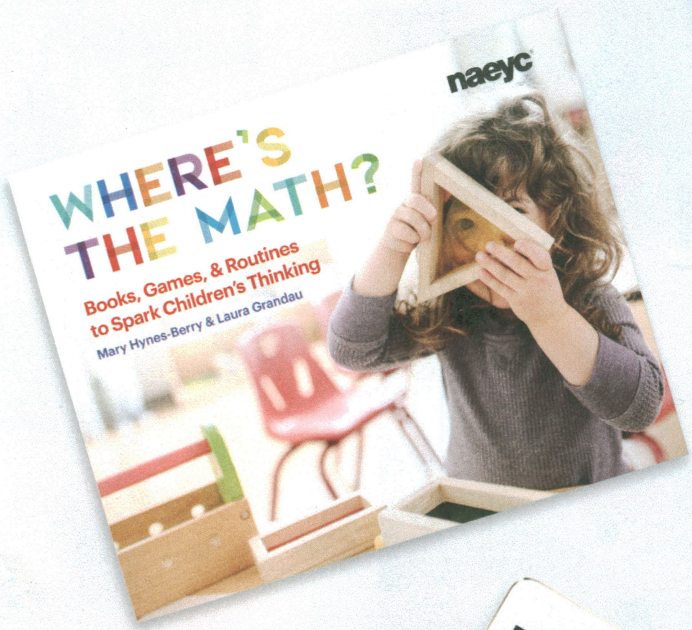

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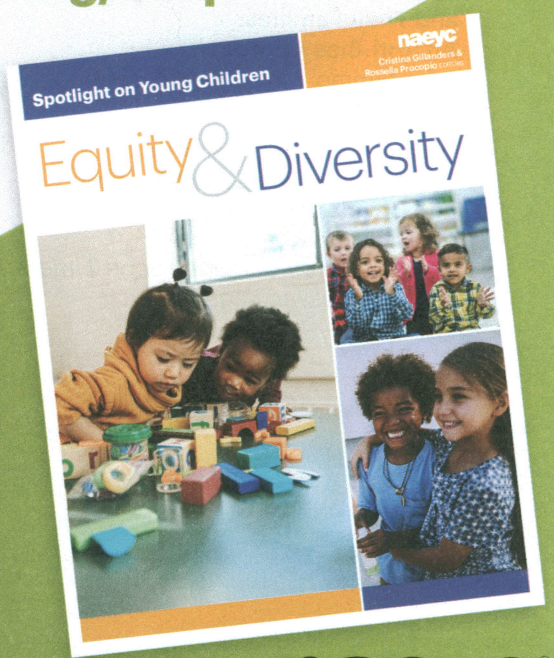

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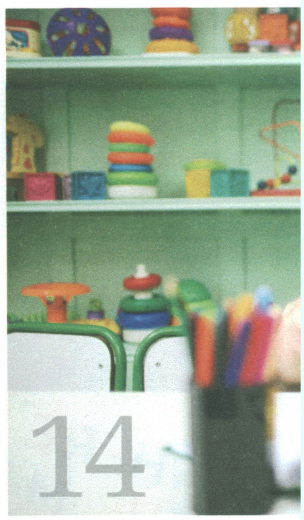

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Lisa Hansel

YC Editor in Chief

Embracing Anti-Bias Education

For me, embracing anti-bias education is about bringing out the best in all of us—ourselves, our colleagues, and the children and families we serve. It gives us a framework for identifying and living our values. It invites us to honor all children's humanity and to think deeply about what maximizing each child's potential requires. It shows us a pathway that begins with adults engaging in self-reflection and ends with children having the skills, knowledge, and strengths they need to stand up for themselves and others. Most important, it enables us to forgive our failures and try again each day.

This *Young Children* cluster opens with an overview of anti-bias education drawn from the second edition of NAEYC's bestselling book *Anti-Bias Education For Young Children and Ourselves*, by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards. "Understanding Anti-Bias Education: Bringing the Four Core Goals to Every Facet of Your Curriculum" offers guidelines for teacher-planned and child-initiated activities that will help children develop positive identities, take joy in diversity, understand bias, and act according to their beliefs. (Stay tuned: this new edition will be available early in 2020.)

Preparing to engage in anti-bias education starts with self-reflection. We must question our own thoughts and feelings—searching for stereotypes and prejudices—before (and while) we help children develop their own anti-bias understandings. In a memoir-style article, Ellen Ellsberg Edge, a former teacher and center director, courageously shares her self-reflections. In "What 's Love Got to Do with It? Relationships and Reflection in Early Childhood Programs," Edge reveals assumptions she made about children and the resulting interactions that, in retrospect, she regrets. Having learned a great deal in her more than 20 years working with children, she also provides practical strategies for connecting with each and every child.

Moving to a classroom-level view of anti-bias education, kindergarten teacher Doriet Berkowitz provides a detailed look at how she reexamined her usual unit on identity. "How Do I See Myself? How Do Others See Me? Exploring Identity in Kindergarten" shows a classroom community in flux as some children adhere to traditional binary concepts of gender while others take a more expansive approach in their gender expressions and identities. As children explore gender and other aspects of identity from multiple angles, they think deeply about who they are, how they wish to be perceived, and how to make apparent their respect for the ways others want to be known.

In "Eliot-Pearson Children's School: Building an Inclusive Community and Pursuing Social Justice," Hanna Gebretensae and John Hornstein describe a school-wide commitment to anti-bias education. This collective initiative begins with affirming the home–school connection with 3-year-olds and builds concepts of identity and empowerment, culminating in all first-graders participating in governance through their Class Council. Summing up their commitment to anti-bias education, the authors write, "As much as it is our job to prepare children for school and to assure their emotional well-being, it is equally important for the profession to acknowledge our collective responsibility to foster kindness, compassion, and fairness."

Rounding out this *Young Children* cluster, the last two articles consider two rarely discussed facets of anti-bias education: spirituality and learning standards.

In "Finding a Place for the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Children and Their Families: An Anti-Bias Approach," John Nimmo, Mona M. Abo-Zena, and Debbie LeeKeenan acknowledge that spirituality often feels like a forbidden topic in the classroom—it's too fundamental to individual family values and too

Is your classroom full of children's artwork? We would love to feature it in *Young Children*! See the link at the bottom of the page or email **editorial@naeyc.org** for details.

This finger-painting masterpiece was created by an NAEYC staff member's 4-month-old son.

sensitive for teachers to address. Still, children have questions about spirituality and religion, and teachers may not be able to meaningfully engage in anti-bias education if they feel they must ignore an essential part of a child's identity. To help teachers navigate these concerns, the authors offer methods for helping children develop religious literacy as part of their anti-bias education.

According to Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards, a "basic premise in anti-bias education is 'We are all the same. We are all different. Isn't that wonderful!'" Yet as Jeanne L. Reid, Catherine Scott-Little, and Sharon Lynn Kagan point out, learning standards tend to not recognize children's differences. In "Diverse Children, Uniform Standards: Using Early Learning and Development Standards in Multicultural Classrooms," the authors summarize recent research showing culture-based variations among children in several developmental domains (such as different ways of paying attention and different ways of seeking help). They also assist teachers in using their deeper understanding of the impact of culture to recognize—and avoid reinforcing—cultural biases embedded in learning standards. With care and intentionality, teachers can meet the standards' goals while celebrating children's diversity.

Whether you are considering anti-bias education for the first time or you are gathering fresh ideas to continue your journey, I hope you hold tight to the joy in this work. On the most challenging days, begin your self-reflection with Derman-Sparks' and Edwards' wise words: "Anti-bias work is essentially optimistic work about the future for our children."

—Lisa Hansel

We'd love to hear from you!

Send your thoughts on this issue, and on topics you'd like to read about in future issues of *Young Children*, to editorial@naeyc.org.

Would you like to see your children's artwork featured in these pages? For guidance on submitting print-quality photos (as well as details on permissions and licensing), see **NAEYC.org/resources/pubs/authors-photographers/photos**.

Understanding Anti-Bias Education

Bringing the Four Core Goals to Every Facet of Your Curriculum

By Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards

Anti-bias education is not just doing occasional activities about diversity and fairness topics (although that may be how new anti-bias educators begin). To be effective, anti-bias education works as an underpinning perspective, which permeates everything that happens in an early childhood program—including your interactions with children, families and coworkers—and shapes how you put curriculum together each day.

This article is an excerpt of the second edition of *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards. An NAEYC bestseller, this book helps early childhood educators fulfill their mission of helping all children reach their full potential. The new edition—with major updates to all chapters, including gender identity—will be available early in 2020.

The four core goals of anti-bias education

Four core goals provide a framework for the practice of anti-bias education with children. Grounded in what we know about how children construct identity and attitudes, the goals help you create a safe, supportive learning community for every child. They support children's development of a confident sense of identity without needing to feel superior to others; an ease with human diversity; a sense of fairness and justice; the skills of empowerment; and the ability to stand up for themselves or for others.

Goal 1: Identity

- **Teachers will nurture each child's construction of knowledgeable, confident, individual personal and social identities.**
- **Children will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.**

This goal means supporting children to feel strong and proud of who they are without needing to feel superior to anyone else. It means children will learn accurate, respectful language to describe who they and others are. Teachers will support children to develop and be comfortable within their home culture and within the school culture. Goal 1 is the starting place for all children, in all settings.

Adding to early childhood education's long-term commitment to nurturing each child's individual, personal identity, anti-bias education emphasizes the important idea of nurturing children's social (or group) identities. Social identities relate to the significant group categorizations of the society in which we grow up and live and which individuals share with many others. Social identities include (but are not limited to) gender, racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and economic class groups. (In the forthcoming book, social identity is described in detail in Chapter 2.) A strong sense of both individual and group identities is the foundation for the three other core anti-bias goals.

Goal 2: Diversity

- **Teachers will promote each child's comfortable, empathetic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.**
- **Children will express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring connections across all dimensions of human diversity.**

This goal means guiding children to be able to think about and have words for how people are the same and how they are different. It includes helping children feel and behave respectfully, warmly, and confidently with people who are different from themselves. It includes encouraging children to learn both about how they are different from other children and about how they are similar. These are never either/or realities because people are *simultaneously* the same and different from one another. This goal is the heart of learning how to treat all people caringly and fairly.

Some teachers and parents are not sure they should encourage children to "notice" and learn about differences among people. They may think it is best to teach only about how people are the same, worrying that talking about differences causes prejudice. While well intentioned, this concern arises from a mistaken notion about the sources of bias. Differences do not create bias. *Children learn prejudice from prejudice*—not from learning about human diversity. It is how people respond to differences that teaches bias and fear.

Another misconception about Goal 2 is that exploring differences among people ignores appreciating the similarities. Goal 2 calls for creating a balance between exploring people's differences and similarities. All human beings share similar biological attributes, needs, and rights (e.g., the needs for food, shelter, and love; the commonalities of language,

families, and feelings) and people live and meet these shared needs and rights in many different ways. A basic premise in anti-bias education is *"We are all the same. We are all different. Isn't that wonderful!"*

Goal 3: Justice

- **Teachers will foster each child's capacity to critically identify bias and will nurture each child's empathy for the hurt bias causes.**
- **Children will increasingly recognize unfairness (injustice), have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.**

This goal is about building children's innate, budding capacities for empathy and fairness, as well as their cognitive skills for thinking critically about what is happening around them. It is about building a sense of safety, the sense that everyone can and will be treated fairly.

Learning experiences include opportunities for children to understand and practice skills for identifying unfair and untrue images (stereotypes), comments (teasing, name-calling), and behaviors (isolation, discrimination) directed at themselves or at others. This includes issues of gender, race, ethnicity, language, disability, economic class, age, body shape, and more. These are early lessons in critical thinking for children, figuring out what they see and hear and testing it against the notions of kindness and fairness.

These lessons build on young children's implicit interest in what is "fair" and "not fair."

As children come to identify unfair experiences and as they learn that unfair can be made fair, children gain an increased sense of their own power in the world. Children cannot construct a strong self-concept, or develop respect for others, if they do not know how to identify and resist hurtful, stereotypical, and inaccurate messages or actions directed toward themselves or others. Developing the ability to think critically strengthens children's sense of self, as well as their capacity to form caring relationships with others.

Goal 4: Activism

- **Teachers will cultivate each child's ability and confidence to stand up for oneself and for others in the face of bias.**
- **Children will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.**

Goal 4 is about giving children tools for learning how to stand up to hurtful and unfair biased behavior based on any aspect of social identity. Biased behavior may be directed at oneself or another. It may come from another child or adult or from children's books, television, and films. This goal strengthens children's development in perspective taking, positive interactions with others, and conflict-resolution education.

Actions of teasing, rejection, and exclusion because of some aspect of a child's social identities are a form of aggressive behavior. They are just as serious as physical aggression. The old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" is false. Children's developing sense of self is hurt by name-calling, teasing, and exclusion based on identity. And children who engage in such hurtful behaviors are learning it is acceptable to hurt others, the earliest form of bullying. An anti-bias approach calls on

teachers to intervene gently but firmly, support the child who is the target of the biased behavior, and help both children learn other ways of interacting.

Children's growth on Goal 4 strengthens their growth on the other three goals. If a child is the target of prejudice or discrimination, she needs tools to resist and to know that she has worth (Goal 1). When a child speaks up for another child, it reinforces his understanding of other people's unique feelings (Goal 2). When children are helped to act, it broadens their understanding of "unfairness" and "fairness" (Goal 3).

Guidelines for your curriculum

Just about every subject area in the typical early childhood program has possibilities for anti-bias education themes and activities. For instance, early childhood education themes of self-discovery, family, and community are deeper, and more meaningful, when they include explorations of ability, culture, economic class, gender identity, and racialized identity. So, too, issues of fairness (Goal 3) and acting for fairness (Goal 4) arise as children explore various curriculum topics.

Differences do not create bias. *Children learn prejudice from prejudice*—not from learning about human diversity. It is how people respond to differences that teaches bias and fear.

The ideas for specific anti-bias education content and activities come from three major sources. One is from children's questions, interests, or interactions with each other that classroom teachers see as important to respond to and develop. Teacher-initiated activities are a second source of anti-bias activities, based on what classroom teachers and families think is important for children to learn. A third source is significant events that occur in the children's communities and the larger world that classroom teachers think need to be explored with children.

Here is an example of an anti-bias education topic at snack time.

> It is snack time in the 4-year-old room. The teacher sets a small pitcher of water on the table for children to pour and drink. Lupe, whose home language is Spanish, looks up and asks, "Agua?" Casey, sitting next to her, says with annoyance, "No! It's water—not ahhgwa" (exaggerating the pronunciation). The teacher stops what she is doing and turns to Casey and says, "Lupe is right. What you call 'water' her family calls 'agua.' There are many words for water, for crackers, for oranges, for everything! We all have words. We have *different* words. It's pretty wonderful!"
>
> At group time, the teacher follows up by asking children about the different words they have for people in their family. As the children call out *Grandma, Oma, Pops, Daddy, Papa, Abuelita,* and more, she writes them on a chart. She assures them that none of the words are wrong. They are just different. And they all mean someone who loves them.

Meet anti-bias goals in every corner of the classroom

The ongoing examination of how people are simultaneously the same and different provides children with a conceptual framework for thinking about the world they live in. For example, children playing with blocks can learn that although some children like to build tall towers and some like to build long, flat structures on the floor, all the children like to build. Art projects can show enthusiasm and admiration for blacks and browns along with all the other wonderful colors of the spectrum. The common curriculum topic of harvest time can include respecting and making visible the people who grow, pick, and transport our food.

Everyday activities offer opportunities for Goals 3 and 4 as well. Arguments over toys can include discussion of fairness and kindness. Exclusionary play, stereotypes in books, or teasing are experiences open to critical thinking about hurtful behavior and for problem solving toward just solutions.

Use child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities

Children's questions, comments, and behaviors are a vital source of anti-bias curriculum. They spark teachable moments as well as longer-term projects. However, it is not sufficient to do anti-bias activities only when a child brings up a relevant issue. Teacher-initiated activities are also necessary—be they intentionally putting out materials and books to broaden children's awareness or planning specific learning experiences around issues that matter to families and the community.

You do not wait for children to open up the topic of reading or numbers before making literacy and numeracy part of the daily early childhood curriculum. Because you have decided that these understandings and skills are essential for children, you provide literacy and numeracy discussions and activities in your classroom. A balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities is as vital in anti-bias education as in any other part of the early childhood curriculum.

Here's an example of how a teacher begins with a children-generated teachable moment and follows up with teacher-initiated activities:

> After a windstorm broke dozens of small branches off of the trees surrounding their preschool, several 4- and 5-year-old boys begin building a "club house" by dragging branches and bunches of leaves to a corner in the playground fence. Valeria (4 years old) starts dragging a branch to join them and the boys shout, "No girls allowed! No girls allowed!"
>
> The teacher considers encouraging the boys to welcome their classmate into their play—but then she hesitates. There are larger societal issues embedded in this interaction. As an anti-bias educator, she decides she needs to address the underlying ideas, especially that girls can't or shouldn't engage in play that emphasizes physical strength or that "real boys" don't include girls in their play.
>
> Deciding to find out what the children are thinking, the teacher asks, "Why do you think no girls are allowed?" She listens carefully to the boys' responses: "Girls can't move the big branches." "And they can't build high!" "We're going to be superheroes! Girls can't be heroes." And, finally, "We don't like girls." All these statements reflect commonly held stereotypes about girls. Additionally, she thinks, not seriously addressing the situation reinforces the additional stereotype that boys don't have to pay attention to the feelings of others.
>
> Seeing an opportunity to expand their thinking, the teacher suggests testing these claims. She says, "Well, let's find out if girls can move the big branches and build high or not." Since many of the children are now gathering around,

Planning Anti-Bias Education Activities for Your Program's Curriculum

An anti-bias education approach is not a recipe. Rather, teachers include anti-bias issues in their planning by considering the children and families they serve and the curriculum approach their program uses. Here are key questions to ask yourself as you and your colleagues plan learning activities and environments. Begin by asking yourself these questions for one or two activities a week, and see how they change what you do and how the children respond.

- Where do I best fit anti-bias goals and issues into my curriculum plans for the day and the week?
- Who might be left out of this curriculum? How will I use the topic to include *each* child, connecting to the diversity of their social identities and to their individual needs? How can I be sure no one is invisible or unnoticed?
- What ideas, misconceptions, and stereotypes might children have about this topic? How can I learn what these are and provide accurate information and counter misinformation and stereotypes?
- How can I use this topic to support and strengthen children's innate sense of justice and their capacity to change unfair situations to fair ones?
- What learning materials do I need to gather to incorporate an anti-bias perspective into this curriculum topic?

she invites everyone to join in the challenge. "What do you think is going to happen?" she asks. With much laughter the children run and gather branches. Some girls are faster than some boys, some boys are faster than some girls. Everyone is able to add branches to the club house, which is suddenly much higher!

Bringing the children back together, the teacher says, "It looks like both girls and boys can lift big branches and build high. Thinking that boys would be better at these things than girls was a stereotype." Several children repeat the word *stereotype* (preschoolers love big words!). Still holding their attention, the teacher clarifies and gives words to the program's values: "Stereotypes are unfair. In our school we want everyone to be treated fairly. What can we do so that we can be sure that we play together fairly?" The next steps are suggested by the children. One suggestion is a sign that says "Everyone can play here." "How about," says one of the boys who began this episode, "how about if we want to play alone, we just say 'you can have a turn in a few minutes'?"

Knowing that one interaction is never enough to help children think in new ways, the teacher plans and carries out further activities. She adds to the classroom library books in which female athletes and firefighters are strong and fast. At circle time, she reads books in which girls and boys play together in big muscle games. She invites a female carpenter in to help the children build with real tools. And she begins a curriculum on "Being a hero," about all the ways boys and girls can be powerful helpers.

In the next staff meeting, the teacher relates what she has done and is planning to do, and why. She asks her colleagues to consider the frequency of gendered exclusionary play in the program and they agree to take the important step of identifying how (explicitly and implicitly) they may be supporting a binary view of gender (see Chapter 9 in the forthcoming book) in their classroom. For example, how often do they call out "boys and girls" rather than "children"? Do they ask "strong boys" to help move furniture and big blocks? Do they comment on girls' clothing or hair instead of asking about their interests and accomplishments?

Do they support boys' tender, sharing, inclusive behaviors or mainly comment on their noisy, power-focused play? The teachers agree to observe each other as well as the children and see what changes they can make to avoid the damage that gender stereotypes have on children's sense of themselves and of others.

Using a combination of child-initiated, teachable moments and teacher-initiated, pre-planned activities is the most effective way to expand children's ability to grow in the four anti-bias education goals and to talk about, think about, and understand the world around them.

Pay attention to the realities of children's lives

While the four core anti-bias education goals are the same for all children, specific activities should be relevant to the children's backgrounds and their lives. Some children need support to resist messages of racial or cultural inferiority; others need guidance to develop a positive self-concept without absorbing social messages that they are the "normal" ones and other children are less than, strange, or negatively different. Children of wealthy families need help resisting the message that material accumulation defines their

worth and that of others; children of families with fewer resources need support to resist messages that undercut their families' worth. Some girls may need extra support to develop confidence and interest in experiences that are math and science related; some boys may require help to develop skills for having nurturing, cooperative interactions with their peers and to engage in play that reflects these attitudes.

Closing thoughts

As in all other areas of the curriculum, teachers tailor and scaffold anti-bias education materials and activities to each child's cognitive, social, and emotional developmental capacities. They plan and choose learning experiences that stimulate children to explore the next step of new ideas and skills and allow each child to apply new understandings and behaviors in his or her daily life.

About the authors

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Julie Olsen Edwards, coauthor of *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves,* was on the faculty of Cabrillo College's early childhood education department for 45 years. A lifetime activist for children and families, she continues to write, teach, and consult on issues of equity, diversity, and anti-bias.

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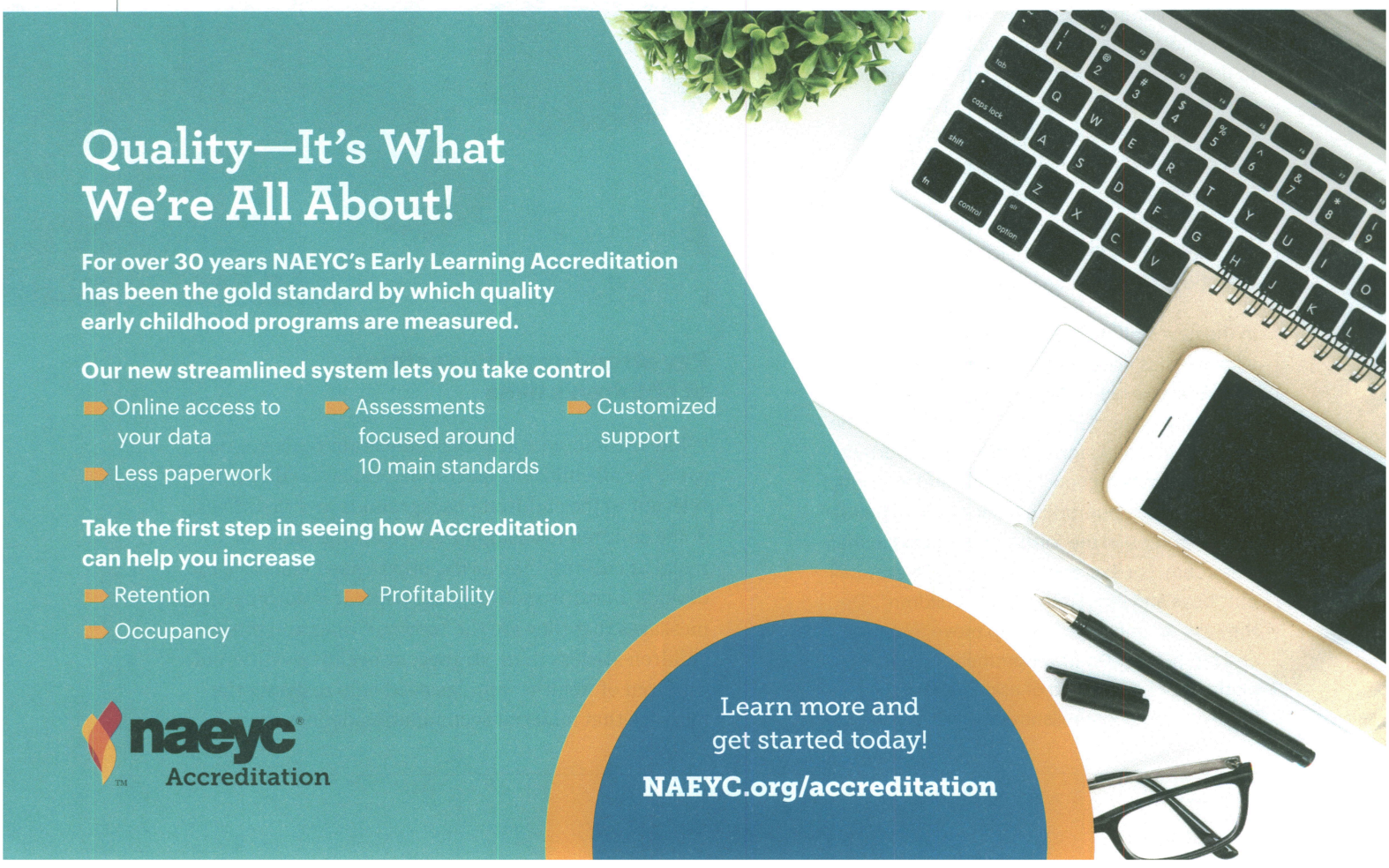

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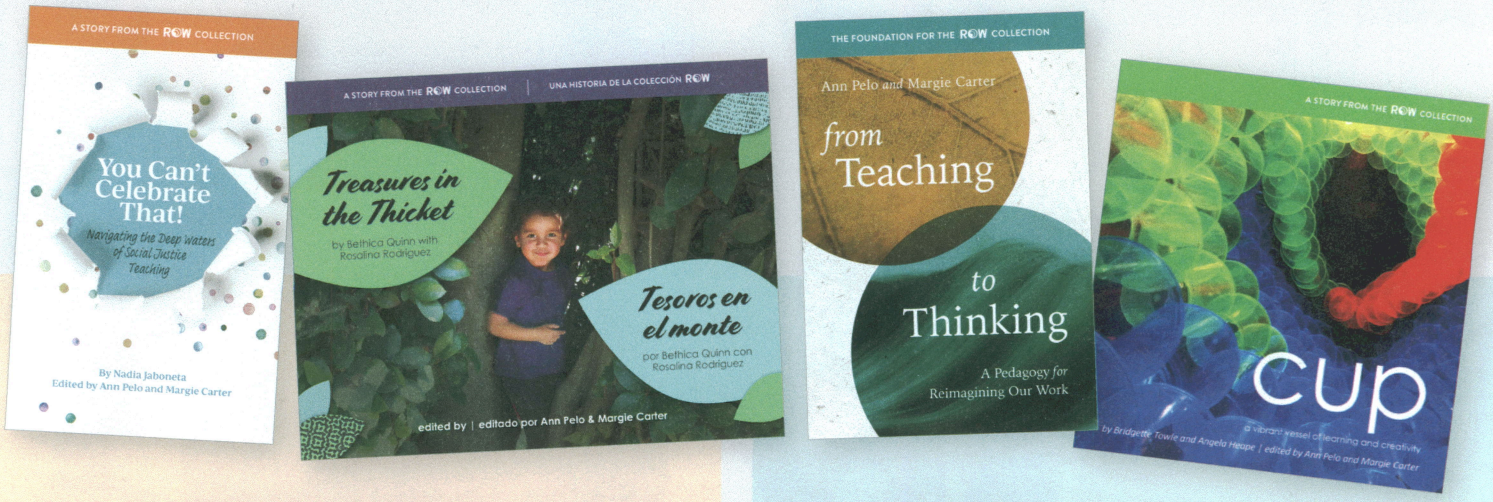

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by Ann Pelo and Margie Carter

Take a deep dive into the principles at the foundation of the *Reimagining Our Work* (ROW) Collection. With gentle guidance and bold provocations, you will be inspired to think deeply about your truest desires for yourself as an educator of young children as you reimagine your own work.

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What's Love Got to Do with It?

Relationships and Reflection in Early Childhood Programs

Ellen Ellsberg Edge

Reflection is the foundation of anti-bias work for educators. Ellen Edge's courage in reflecting openly and honestly provides a model for all of us. She shares both the gut reactions she is not proud of and the tough questions she asks herself as she works to change how she sees children, families, and her role as a teacher. In doing so, she embodies a core idea from NAEYC's new position statement on advancing equity: "Early childhood educators can model humility and a willingness to learn by being accountable for any negative impacts of their own biases on their interactions with children and their families." (Visit **NAEYC.org/equity** *for the full statement.) Edge also shows the rewards of self-reflection in her ever-increasing ability to cultivate strong, trusting relationships with the children in her classroom.*

—*Young Children* Editors

I'd like to share a memory from my days as a teacher. This event took place about 30 years ago.

> B., age 3, is waiting with other children in the bathroom to wash his hands before snack. I look over and he makes a gesture to me that most of us would interpret as "I'm going to cut your throat." Perhaps you have seen that gesture, in which a person drags a finger across the throat, looking at you in a menacing way.
>
> Here's what I think in the moments following his gesture: "He's a psychopath"; "His father menaces this child's family members and this little boy is imitating his father's behaviors"; "His family allows him to watch inappropriate media where this gesture was observed and copied." I have these thoughts in no particular order and with no data to back them up—they just rise to the surface of my mind.

I share this recollection, which I'm not proud of, because this example is packed with tendencies that are likely familiar to all of us who work with young children. I have often wondered, and joined my fellow teachers in wondering, about the root causes of certain children's behaviors. Sometimes our theories are grounded in evidence and information shared by families and specialists; sometimes they are not. I would place the thoughts I had about B. with the latter: they were neither grounded in evidence nor developed in collaboration with a family member or specialist. I also share this recollection to illustrate that all of us involved in this work are susceptible to the influences of our feelings, values, biases, and gut reactions.

All of us involved in this work are susceptible to the influences of our feelings, values, biases, and gut reactions.

My thoughts about B. were more like mental reflexes than carefully considered ideas—as I reflect back I wonder if they interfered with my ability to establish a trusting bond with B. Building that positive bond matters. When we as teachers can't form secure and trusting bonds with the young children in our classrooms or programs, the result may be a significant negative impact on those children's development, especially their ability to form healthy relationships. Most importantly, our influence during early childhood can impact children's trajectories going forward, academically and in life. All of this emanates from the quality of our relationships.

If a child's early relationships involve trust and security, the child usually has more positive outcomes later in life, while poor early relationships can have negative effects down the line (Myers & Pianta 2008). Particularly during the first 3 to 5 years, brain development can be influenced in significant ways, with impacts on such things as regulation of emotions, deferral of gratification, short-term memory, and stress management (Zeanah 2009). It has been said that we have an "ecological brain" (Shore 1996) during our very early years because our first relationships have such a huge influence on our development. The takeaway here is that we early childhood teachers really do make a big difference.

Don't believe everything you think

When we are in the moment with children, our thoughts can affect how we respond to them and, consequently, the formation of positive relationships. It's worthwhile to dig into those ideas we have, question whether to believe them, and see just how big their impact is. When we find ourselves confronted by children's challenging behavior, we often jump to conclusions, such as making judgments about the family, who they are, and how they parent. We also draw conclusions about the child's moral character. Some of these are driven by our biases, values, judgments, and assumptions.

When our ideas contain elements of bias, they may not only inhibit our ability to build a positive and trusting relationship with the child but also affect the quality of relationship we have with the family. One of my most important realizations is that I have sometimes failed to consider how my own biases affected my reactions to children's behavior. If a child's behavior doesn't align with our ideas about right and wrong, and we don't pause to question our assumptions, we may make judgments about the child and family—and,

by extension, their cultural norms—and we may have greater difficulty establishing the kind of bond the child needs to succeed in our classrooms.

Attachment and expulsion

John Bowlby, who along with Mary Ainsworth developed attachment theory, once explained that "an unwanted child is likely not only to feel unwanted, but to believe that he is essentially unwantable, namely unwanted by anyone" (1973, 204). I wonder: How did B. feel about himself? Did I make him feel unwanted?

Attachment theory raises questions like these, highlighting the importance of reflecting—especially when, as with B., it would be so much more comfortable to forget. Here's the hardest part: sometimes we really help children and sometimes *we are the problem*. Sometimes we form relationships that are supportive and buffer children from risk, while other times we form relationships that are not consistently caring and are potentially a source of risk. Negative early interactions can become the basis for a pattern of student–teacher conflict over time (Caspi & Silva 1995). A child's early challenging behaviors can lead to a negative first encounter with their first non-familial care provider; these interactions may initially seem insignificant but can grow to harmful proportions over time, leading to later difficulties (Howes & Hamilton 1992; Myers & Pianta 2008).

A clear manifestation of this problem is the high rate of expulsion of young children. One review of research that examined several studies conducted over the past 20 years found that, "taken together, annual expulsions in state-funded prekindergartens are estimated to be about 3 times higher than in K–12, and in child care programs, many of which are less-regulated, more poorly-resourced, and have a less trained workforce, it is as much as 13 times higher" (Meek & Gilliam 2016, 4).

> A child who has been expelled has had some powerful experiences telling him that he is "unwanted."

A recent analysis of data from a nationally representative survey conducted in 2016 estimates that, in the 12 months prior to the survey, 17,000 preschoolers were expelled, and another 50,000 were suspended (Malik 2017). Both of these studies find that African American boys are especially—and quite disproportionately—at risk for expulsion. A child who has been expelled from one or more programs before entering kindergarten has already had some powerful experiences telling him that he is "unwanted" and "unwantable." Sadly, this may be apparent to his kindergarten teacher when he arrives at the classroom door.

How we think about behavior

Early in my teaching career, B. was not the only child whose behavior I couldn't relate to or understand. Here's another example from one of my classrooms in which a child displays physical aggression, destruction of property, and noncompliance with classroom expectations—all common yet concerning behaviors:

> S., a 3-year-old, gives M., also 3, a painting she has made for him. M. takes her picture, crumples it, and throws it in the trash. I think I see a smirk on his face as he does this.

This small event triggered me and affected the way I thought about M. going forward. Looking back on my time with M., it is now clear that I failed to establish a relationship with him when he entered my classroom. From the first day, he displayed behaviors that I

interpreted to mean that he didn't want to be there, including hitting, punching, kicking, and screaming every time he entered the classroom. He appeared to resist my efforts to draw him into the community of children, and he engaged in behaviors that were generally noncompliant. He acted aggressively toward other children without any antecedents or provocation (that I could discern). He hid classroom materials and often said threatening things, such as when he told a classmate "I'm going to hammer this nail into your belly" while engaged in a wood-working activity. As my efforts to engage him failed over time and his aggressive behavior toward me and other children escalated, I realized that I wasn't happy to see him each day—I'll even admit to some dread. I wonder how he felt about seeing me!

Within the developmental psychopathology literature, terms like "deviant" or "delinquent" are frequently used, especially in reference to young adults who have engaged in criminal behaviors (APA 2013). I have seen this framing seep into discussions among early childhood educators. Too often, when we think about children with challenging behaviors, we seem to either think children "have something" (i.e., a mental illness) or we see them as criminals in the making. How often have we said to ourselves or to our close colleagues, "I bet we'll read about him in the papers in a few years"? I did see M. as deviating from the norms I established in the classroom. He and I fell into a relational dynamic that would, over time, resemble "cops and robbers" more than "teacher and child."

Instead of asking "How can I get this child to comply?," perhaps we might ask "Should I rethink the rule?"

Noncompliance and autonomy

Oftentimes, the "challenging" behaviors that we teachers encounter involve noncompliance. We regularly encounter those behaviors during transitions, such as toileting routines, cleaning up after lunch, and so on. Since some children seem to have a very hard time with transitions, this raises the question of how noncompliance should be perceived. How do we interpret children's behavior when they don't seem to want to meet our expectations or follow our rules? Rather than being an indication of criminal tendencies in the making, perhaps some noncompliant behaviors may serve as a way for children to assert their independence with respect to their relationships to their parents and caregivers, and as they begin to interact with the wider world (Kuczynski et al. 1987; Kuczynski & Kochanska 1990). When we observe a child engaging in noncompliant behaviors, the child's goal may be to "carve out a personal domain of actions where they can actively stake claims to autonomy, control, and choice" (Lagattuta, Nucci, & Bosacki 2010, 629; Nucci & Turiel 2000).

Instead of asking "How can I get this child to comply?," perhaps we might ask "What is this child's perspective regarding this classroom rule? Should I rethink the rule or change how we make the transition?" We might also reflect on how often children have a voice in their classroom experiences.

As a teacher, I also found it helpful to assess my learning environment. One useful model is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which measures teacher–child relationships and the emotional climate of the classroom, examines "regard for student perspective," and "captures the degree to which the teachers' interactions with students and classroom activities place an emphasis on the students' interest, motivations, and points of view, and encourage student responsibility and autonomy" (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre 2008, 38). The design of our day, our transitions, and our expectations all play a role in the question of compliance. I've found that giving children as much autonomy as possible throughout the day minimizes power struggles.

Is the problem within the child?

When we teachers make judgments about children's behavior, we tend to place responsibility (or blame) on the child's experiences when they *aren't* in school. But how often do we consider what we bring to the situation? Researchers Robert Pianta and Daniel Walsh observed that this framing "places the problem outside the agency of the school. Educators cannot fix misfiring neurons or faulty genes, nor can they fix dysfunctional households" (1996, 50). Pianta and Walsh's observation is supported by their own and

others' research. Nearly four decades ago, a study of teachers' reasons for referring children for evaluation found that school-based factors like the quality of instruction were almost never considered as very important (Christenson et al. 1983). Perhaps this makes sense—I used to believe I had done everything I could before referring a child for evaluation. But referrals are often for behavior, and research shows that stronger relationships between teachers and students are related to better student behavior, engagement, and achievement (Decker, Dona, & Christenson 2007).

We very rarely think that the problem has to do with us or how we might be engaging with the child. However, there is strong evidence that our relationships with children play a critical role. This is not to say that we teachers cause or can eliminate all or even most challenging behaviors. Still, there clearly are situations in which we can change our behavior to form more caring and beneficial relationships with the children in our classrooms.

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Relationship-Based Practice

There is a growing conversation among advocates and researchers about the benefits of relationship-based practices in early childhood programs. As Carollee Howes and Sharon Ritchie observe in *A Matter of Trust*, "the ability to learn depends on negotiating a trusting relationship with the teacher" (2002, 3). Along these lines, Lesley Koplow has promoted emotionally responsive practice to support children's mental health, Susan Cole has proposed the formation of trauma-sensitive schools, and Mary Louise Hemmeter has encouraged relationship-based practices to prevent challenging behavior. Drawing from these strategies, I offer some practical guidance on building strong relationships with children, for both teachers and program administrators.

- **Be trustworthy.** While there are many times when we need to redirect children, these interactions do not have to be negative. Adopt a positive statement that you can use consistently, such as "I'm going to help you," so that you can approach almost any behavior in a supportive, predictable manner.

- **Validate children's experiences and feelings.** We all want to be heard and understood. Rather than saying to a child "Don't worry about it" or "It will be okay," acknowledge feelings using phrases like "It looks like that made you mad" or "That must have been scary."

- **Participate in learning with children.** We teachers can play with children and join in activities with them. When we demonstrate joy and active interest alongside children, we can inspire them toward greater engagement with the curriculum.

- **Be consistent, warm, and firm.** This doesn't imply inflexibility. However, it is necessary that we always follow through on expectations. Limits must consistently be maintained to create a safe, predictable environment.

- **Make a plan and share the schedule.** We build trust when we discuss the day's activities with children and involve them in the planning process. We also help them stay on track when we display the plan, such as with a picture-based schedule.

- **Give warnings before transitions and new experiences.** When you forecast changes to routines and provide reminders of upcoming transitions, you help children prepare themselves for change.

- **Avoid power struggles.** Like adults, children need to have some autonomy. When possible, give children choices about what they will do and how they will do it. When a child is overtly noncompliant, focusing on de-escalation and determining the child's motivation are more likely to help in the long run than forcing compliance.

- **Support children's positive behaviors and learning.** Notice the children's experiences in the classroom and promote their success by giving cues, encouragement, and support. A smile can go a long way!

- **Maintain high expectations.** We must act as though children will do their best. State expectations in a firm, encouraging voice (without a punitive tone); kindness and warmth are essential for our students to be motivated and successful. Notice when children comply and when they try hard.

- **Reflect on how we treat each and every child.** We have a tendency to give more reprimands than positive comments to children who engage in challenging behavior. When we have difficulty forming relationships with certain children, we need to realize that these are the children who most need to bond with us.

- **Visit families' homes or meet with them in their neighborhoods.** A visit with B.'s or M.'s family at the start of our time together might have prevented me from making some outsized, counterproductive assumptions. Meeting a family in an environment that is comfortable for them shows how much you care and allows you to begin building a personal relationship away from the bustle of the classroom.

- **Be friendly.** Social conversations involving easy and casual banter between teacher and child can go a long way toward building those strong bonds of attachment. Had I simply played with M. or B. and talked to them about their interests, devoid of any expectations or requirements, I might also have gained their trust. Meal times and outside exploration time offer great opportunities for this.

To learn more about building strong, trusting relationships with children, I recommend reading the work of the researchers and educators I mentioned above:

- Carollee Howes, director of the Center for Improving Child Care Quality at the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies: https://ciccq.gseis.ucla.edu/howes.html

- Sharon Ritchie, senior research scientist at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute: https://fpg.unc.edu/node/717

- Lesley Koplow, director of Emotionally Responsive Practice at the Bank Street College of Education: https://www.bankstreet.edu/our-work-with-schools-and-communities/emotionally-responsive-practice/supports-and-services/

- Susan Cole, director of the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative: https://traumasensitiveschools.org/about-tlpi/team/

- Mary Louise Hemmeter, principal investigator at the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning: http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/about.html

Changing the course

While I have my regrets about B. and M., what I find most important is learning from those experiences. Today, a key question I ask is "What can we do to help children feel wanted?" Children need to feel that they belong in the classroom—and it is incumbent upon their teachers to make them feel welcome and safe. As early childhood educators, we are perfectly situated to give children the caring support they need to see themselves as worthwhile and capable of loving, being loved, and being successful in school and in life. This is especially so for children who have had adverse experiences during their early years. When children with multiple risk factors in their lives experience quality early childhood programming provided by a consistently warm and caring teacher, their trajectories can be improved (Pungello et al. 2010). We really do help these children when we get it right!

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How Do I See Myself? How Do Others See Me?

Exploring Identity in Kindergarten

Doriet Berkowitz

In the winter of 2017, my teaching intern and I launched a self-identity unit with our 26 kindergartners. Unlike the more typical "How are we the same? How are we different?" units I had shaped and implemented in prior years, we planned this unit with the knowledge that our classroom community included at least one child who is transgender and at least one child with a family member who identifies as neither male nor female. We also had several students who did not follow gender-normative fashion and others who reacted by voicing traditional ideas about how girls and boys are supposed to dress. Seeing a need to bring up gender expression and identity in an

intentional and age-appropriate way, we also hoped the unit would inspire ongoing conversations and cultivate more perspective taking. We wanted all of the children to understand the many ways individuals present themselves to each other and how they might wish to be seen by others in our community.

I work at a public charter school where our shared vision is "to eliminate the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special abilities on student success in our school and in our communities, by working together with families and community to ensure each child's success." (Learn more by visiting the school's website: www.theprojectschool.org.) With this vision guiding my teaching, I am not only permitted but *expected* to use time and resources to grow and foster the social and emotional understanding, confidence, and sense of community among the children in my classroom each and every school day. Much of our practice is grounded in Teaching Tolerance's anti-bias framework (Van der Valk 2014), and we aim to shape our social studies curriculum from these social justice anchor standards and domains of identity, diversity, justice, and action. I feel aligned with and inspired by Teaching Tolerance blogger Becki Cohn-Vargas's (2015) call to "help students feel secure in their identities and free to be who they are and thrive at school."

This article outlines the different focuses, experiences, and conversations we held as a kindergarten community during our self-identity unit. It provides particular guiding questions, read alouds, visual prompts, and conversation starters meant to facilitate deeper and more critical thinking for kindergartners as they investigate who they are, how they are connected to each other, and how they want to be seen. This unit can also be adapted with older students and has the potential to be a catalyst for ongoing, daily anti-bias education and inclusive community building.

Parts of who I am

As part of a larger investigation into their self-identities, the children began by representing different people, hobbies, sports, animals, objects, and memories that are important to them as parts of a mobile to hang outside our classroom. This was a comfortable place to start because they are experts on themselves and could choose what was most important about themselves that they wanted to share. This initial project took place alongside work they had done illustrating their own heart maps, which are drawn and labeled depictions of special people, pets, places, collections, and memories that they could tell true stories about.

We launched this self-identity unit with the mobile and heart map projects because they focus on celebrating children's strengths and unique stories. They highlight that every child is part of a family, friendship, or group in which others care for them. These initial projects also show that each child's identity is not identical to friends' or classmates' identities—that their hobbies, favorite foods, experiences, and dreams can be different. Making and presenting the mobiles and heart maps fostered a space in which kindergarten community members could feel a sense of belonging and significance while attending to the multiple perspectives and life stories of their classmates (Peterson 1992).

Differing perspectives

Once the children were comfortable and familiar exploring the question "How do we see ourselves?" my intern and I helped them think about how *others* might see them and how they *want to be seen*. We asked the kindergartners to name a word they wanted other people to say about them. From this, several examples of discord emerged. One student shared, "I want people to think I eat healthy food, but some people say I don't eat healthy food." Another said, "I want people to say I'm cool but they say I'm nothing."

Building on the children's comments, we explored this statement: "The way we see ourselves and the way others see us do not always match." We proceeded to identify different types of toys we like to play with or wish we could play with. Then we thought about certain hobbies or toys we feel afraid to do or play with because of what other people might think. Students used several enlarged illustrations from the book *Who Are You? The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity*, written by Brook Pessin-Whedbee, to identify and circle a variety of items and toys they enjoyed using or wished they could use more confidently. (At this point in the unit, we used the first half of this book as a resource, but I did not read aloud the whole book.) They named reasons for not choosing a particular activity or toy they enjoyed—feeling afraid that others might laugh

at them or that others might think what they've made is "not good." As we shifted to similar questions regarding clothing and accessories, another idea that emerged was that some people might think we don't belong to the group who is "supposed" to "wear the leotard" or "carry the purse."

Embedded in this study of ourselves is a deeper study of our relationships with each other and an understanding of where our ideas come from. Knowing that many people feel safe with family but less comfortable out in public increases children's awareness of different audiences and perspectives. For example, children grappled with what it means if someone feels safe to carry a purse at home, but not when walking around town.

The images in our minds

To prompt further discussion about the mismatch between how we might want to be seen and how we are actually seen, I integrated several read alouds into the unit. One was *Amazing Grace*, written by Mary Hoffman, which is about a young girl who wishes to be Peter Pan in a school play. A student in our class exclaimed, "But she doesn't look like the real Peter Pan!" In response, we examined where the picture in their heads of Peter Pan comes from and whether there is only one possible version of Peter Pan.

I found a variety of images of Peter Pan, including actors from several stage productions and movies, and then followed up by asking students, "What do you notice?" The following observations were shared:

Doriet: If you had a picture of Peter Pan in your head before we started reading *Amazing Grace*, raise your hand if I point to the picture.

The majority of students raise their hands when I point to the Disney cartoon version.

Doriet: I want to show you some other pictures of Peter Pan from movies or plays. What do you notice?

Children point to different images as they share their thoughts.

Jazz: He's fighting Captain Hook.

Atti: I notice this Peter Pan has blood.

Damond: I notice he's smiling like he helped someone beat the bad guy.

Anais: Parts of this one look like a girl.

Doriet: What parts?

Anais: I don't know.

Sal: This one is on a mountain.

Frannie: This looks like the Peter Pan from *Lost Boys*. This one has blond hair, but he usually has red hair. He looks like a really little boy like our age.

Jeff: I notice that this Peter Pan has lots of people behind it, and it has yellow clothes.

Doriet: (*Pointing to an image of an adult male actor as Peter Pan.*) I'm wondering about this picture. It seems different.

Roland: (*Pointing to a cartoon image and to a still image from a recent film.*) I've seen the movie of both of these.

Doriet: (*Pointing to the cartoon image.*) Do you think that the play *Peter Pan* that will be showing in our town theater, that we will go to see together, will have a Peter Pan that looks exactly like this one?

Some students shake their heads no, while others shake their heads yes.

Not long after this discussion, I read aloud *Red: A Crayon's Story*, written by Michael Hall. A crayon labeled "Red" turns out to be wrapped in red paper on the outside but be made of blue wax on the inside. Everything it tries to color turns out to be blue, much to the surprise, frustration, or disappointment of other crayons. The discrepancy highlights the idea that there can be differences between what we outwardly present—or what others project onto us—and how we see ourselves on the inside. Bridging the two, and finding acceptance and validity, became another source of reflection among our students. Michael said, "It isn't Red's fault that they can't color strawberries red. It's the factory's fault." Frannie added, "But once purple crayon could see that Red wasn't really red, she helped Red show its true color."

Assigning labels versus asking about preferences

Author and activist bell hooks states that "when we hear another person's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, it is more difficult to project on to them our perceptions of who they are" (hooks 2000, 49). By opening up a discussion about how we refer to each other, we also became more aware of moments when we assigned labels, including genders, to people, whether or not those people had voiced their preferences. Preparing to read the picture book *We're All Wonders*, by R.J. Palacio, the children and I examined the book's front cover and thought of why Auggie has only one eye showing. As ideas were shared, some students referred to Auggie as "he," while a few students pointed out that we don't know if Auggie is a "he" or "she" because the book doesn't say. Here is how the conversation unfolded:

Doriet: (*Holding up the cover of the book.*) What might Auggie want to be called?

Frannie: It.

Jemma: He.

Josh: The.

Damond: Sami. It's a name my parent uses because they don't prefer the gender pronouns "he" or "she."

Jeremy: They.

Peter: We could call him a medium because maybe he could be a he and a she.

Roland: It looks like a boy and some boys have an eye like Auggie.

Atti: He looks like a pirate because he has no eye there. He's wearing an eye patch behind his skin.

The thoughts that the children shared about how to refer to Auggie introduced new language for us to consider. The conversation served as a very natural, child-led way to discuss and use pronouns; this continued in the future when we read and talked about book characters as well as when we discussed real people in our lives and community. This moment of deciding what to call people provides an opportunity to name in gender-informed and sensitive terms and to counteract our own prior less thoughtful naming conventions we have used by default. When we explore counternarratives, they "encourage us to see the other possible realities. They encourage people to challenge the unquestioning acceptance of cultural norms that have become more or less invisible over time" (Lewison, Leland, & Harste 2014, 92). In our school, we push ourselves and our students to disrupt our "default" language, to reexamine our assumptions about others, and to consider how and why we assign particular labels to ourselves and others.

My goal as an educator is to stretch my students' perspectives (and my own) to appreciate the complexity of who we are in relation to each other. This means that it becomes necessary to seek and create opportunities that highlight the multilayered messiness of who we are rather than the simplicity of who we "should" be. I also introduce children to the concept that gender is a social construct. If not carefully considered, it is likely to be "imposed by society, reinforced by parents, and ultimately perpetuated by children themselves" (Bryan 2012, 42). Recognizing that "students' educational diet is not balanced if they see themselves in the mirror all the time" (Style [1988] 1996, 5), my intern and I worked to open and frame windows to the larger world. We offered a spectrum of voices and perspectives that differ from each other and that stretch the children's thinking a bit more (Style [1988] 1996).

Our efforts appeared to be paying off when our class had the following conversation in response to concerns from a student about comments that his shoes were "girl shoes."

Doriet: What does it mean that shoes are "girl shoes"?

Ben: I like to wear sparkly shoes. That doesn't mean that they're "girl shoes," or that only girls can wear them.

Josh: I think they're pretty.

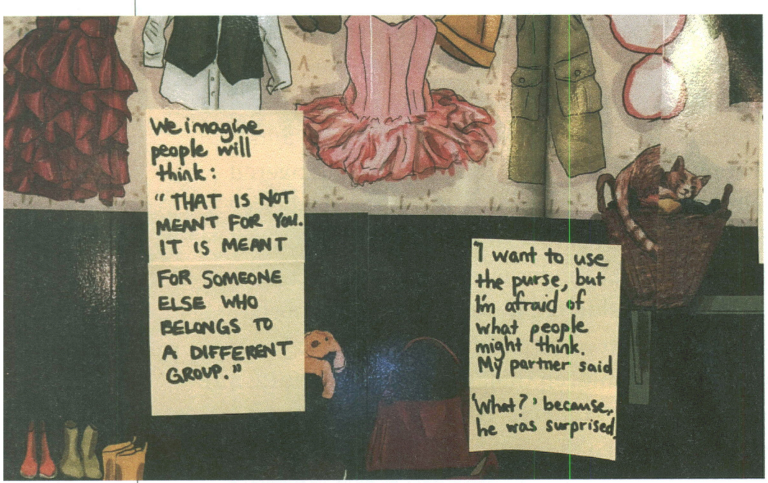
Miranda: There's no such thing as girl shoes or boy shoes.

Manuel: I think you should wear them if they're your favorites.

Doriet: How would you feel if someone told you that you couldn't wear your favorite shoes to school?

Dana: I would be sad if someone told me I couldn't wear my favorite shoes.

As a teacher, I was stretched into reexamining gender-embedded words I myself was using freely with my students that unintentionally excluded at least one family member in our classroom community. After posting a morning message survey question asking "How many moms, dads, and siblings live at home with you?" I realized there was



a parent in our classroom who identified as gender nonbinary—neither a mom nor a dad. The following day, I rephrased my morning message to ask "How many parents and siblings live at home with you?" Changing the word "mom" or "dad" to "parent," helped me change my message in a fundamental way. It became more inclusive, providing an opportunity for all students to participate in answering the question and for all family members to feel cared for in how they identify themselves and wish to be seen. Reflecting on this morning message yet again, I intend to ask, "How many family members live at home with you?" to be even more inclusive. Although all my current kindergartners live with at least one parent, it is not uncommon for children to be raised by grandparents or other family members.

Guiding Questions to Initiate Identity Exploration with Children

1. What do you love about yourself? What makes you special?
2. Can you name a few positive character traits you possess? How do you show or demonstrate them to yourself? How do you show or demonstrate them to others?
3. How are you the same as other people in your community (friends, classmates, family members, sports teams, etc.)? How are you different?
4. Which different groups in your community are you a part of?
5. How do you want other people to see you? What do you want them to say about you?
6. What is a word you hope others use to describe you?
7. What parts do match and what parts don't match between how you *want* to be seen and how you are *actually* seen by others? Why do you think that is? What can you do about it?
8. If someone had the wrong idea about you—about your identity—what are you prepared to say to them?
9. What are some questions you can ask with curiosity if you are confused or do not understand how someone wants to be seen, or what they want to be called?
10. Name a book whose character(s) reflect you in some way. Name a book whose character(s) provide you with a different perspective and experience from your own.

What I want you to know about me...

About a month after launching this unit, we returned to *Who Are You? The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity*, focusing on the second portion about gender identity. The book lists a variety of words related to gender that different people like to be called to match how they see themselves. After finishing this book, and hearing the choices of language beyond binary "boy" or "girl" language, we moved into a slightly higher level of awareness of gender expression and identity. Students explicitly stated what they wished to be called. While most kindergartners wanted to be called what we called them before, two kindergartners asked to be called "they" rather than "he" or "she." (See "Guiding Questions to Initiate Identity Exploration with Children," on page 26.)

Ultimately, this self-identity unit became about caring for each other, paying attention to the language we use to talk about each other, considering the ways we perceive each other, and wondering how those perceptions match or disrupt our preexisting assumptions. In caring for each other, we embraced all definitions of caring—thinking about others, looking after others, and taking on others' troubles. This particular unit emerged and evolved over the course of six weeks, with read alouds and conversations woven through our morning meetings and afternoon project time several hours each week. Over the span of it, we also recognized that "caring is a burden, a commitment, hard work. When we teach children to care, we ask them to accept this burden, to commit themselves to the hard work of caring" (Charney 2002, 22–23).

The lasting effectiveness of this self-identity unit was and will continue to be measured by the level of self-correction we employ when we find ourselves making assertions based on inaccurate assumptions, and the careful and sensitive attention we give to imagining perspectives and experiences different from our own. While gender awareness, expression, and identity were explored in this unit, there are so many other critical components of how we identify ourselves and the groups we belong to that should not be neglected in this process. In this unit, identity issues related to family structures, skin color, nationality, stories of origin, and adoption also emerged. We gave each similar attention when it came to naming experiences and what we want to be called. In exploring these subjects, and in learning to continually reflect and self-correct, we move closer to the world we envision, one in which each person we encounter in our families, schools, and communities feels seen, valued, and understood, and one in which every young child has opportunities to reach their fullest potential.

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Eliot-Pearson Children's School

Building an Inclusive Community and Pursuing Social Justice

Hanna Gebretensae and John Hornstein

The fountain, a hole in an elevated rock through which water flows when a button is pressed, is positioned over a large sand area. Several kindergartners are building dams below the fountain. It is a warm day and the children drift between roles: pressing the button, directing the water from the fountain toward the dams, building the dams, and pushing water from one pool to another. During this play, one boy notices that another, who is not fluent in English, is wearing his boots. "Hey, those are my boots!" he exclaims

A History of Inclusion

The Eliot-Pearson Children's School began in 1922 as the Ruggles Street School and Training Center. As one of the first nursery schools in the US, it became a training ground for preschool teachers. It also served as a research site for those interested in learning about child development, which at the time was a new field of study. In 1926, the Ruggles Street School became the Nursery Training School of Boston, reflecting its primary focus on teacher training. In 1951, it affiliated with Tufts University, and teachers were able to pursue their college educations in conjunction with training in a preschool setting. In 1964, the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study was formally established, with the Children's School as its laboratory and demonstration facility.

Since its founding, Eliot-Pearson has had an inclusive focus. The original Ruggles Street School served children from under-resourced communities; over time, the school emphasized serving children of all abilities and economic backgrounds. By the early 1970s it was leading the way in "mainstreaming" young children with special needs (Meisels 1977). Today, it remains committed to inclusivity and to broadening the field's concept of inclusion, such as by supporting children who are learning more than one language and children whose gender expression and/or identity are expansive.

> We know [our child has] been loved, and he needed that. It's there at all levels, from the administration through the teachers. There's a willingness to figure out how to support the child vs. following the stereotype. Finding different ways to work with the child is what matters.
>
> **—Felicia Share and Sherry Darling, parents**

as he looks intently at the boy wearing them. Then, after a brief pause, he says, "You know where my cubby is." He goes back to working on his dam.

Interactions like the one in the opening vignette are common at Eliot-Pearson Children's School, where our focus is anti-bias education and, most important, kindness. Current studies of child development from across the spectrum of theory and research (Gopnick 2016; LeVine & LeVine 2016) hold that young children are extremely complex learners who develop their knowledge, skills, and beliefs from their entire physical and social context. More than from any specific parenting strategy or teaching style, children form their minds and morals through acting on the world and absorbing a myriad of beliefs and ideas from the settings in which they play and learn.

At Eliot-Pearson, we (the whole school community) have established an intentional and overt process through which children learn compassion toward others, reverence for and interest in the natural world, and generosity toward those who look or act differently than themselves. This approach is built in to school-wide processes and in to each of the classrooms.

Eliot-Pearson is defined by its diversity. Children, staff, and families are seen as sharing an inclusive community with an emphasis on actively and continually assuring that all members of the community fully participate regardless of developmental ability, cultural background, skin color, gender expression or identification, language, or economic status. Particular attention is given to those who, in the broader society, may experience bias and exclusion. Anti-bias values are not simply assumed; they are pronounced on a daily basis in the interactions between members of the community and in the curriculum.

We keep the four goals of anti-bias education at the forefront of our work:

Goal 1: Identity

- Teachers will nurture each child's construction of a knowledgeable, confident, individual, personal identity and of related social identities.
- Children will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

Goal 2: Diversity

- Teachers will promote each child's comfortable, empathetic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Children will express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring connections across all dimensions of human diversity.

Goal 3: Justice

- Teachers will foster each child's capacity to critically identify bias and nurture each child's empathy for the hurt bias causes.
- Children will increasingly recognize unfairness (injustice), have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

Goal 4: Activism

- Teachers will cultivate each child's ability and confidence to stand up for oneself and for others in the face of bias.
- Children will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

(Derman-Sparks & Edwards 2010, 2019)

Anti-bias education supports the development of children's and their families' personal and social identities within a complex and multicultural society. It helps teach children to be proud of themselves and their families, to respect a range of human differences, to recognize unfairness and bias, and to speak their values (Derman-Sparks & Edwards 2010). Through its anti-bias commitment, Eliot-Pearson ensures the right of all children to develop to their fullest potential and to see themselves and their families reflected and respected in their classrooms. (Hence, at Eliot-Pearson we refer to children with special needs as children with special rights.) Inclusive, pro-social, and anti-bullying curriculum and instructional practices are the heart of our work.

Instructional practices focus on the whole child, supporting social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development in the context of children's families and cultures. Teachers intentionally integrate their planned projects with projects that emerge from the children's interests, abilities, and needs. The children themselves are the originators of much of the curriculum. Because children reflect the world they live in, their play and interactions with others reflect what is important to them and what is important in society (Gopnick 2016).

In this article, we share examples of our anti-bias work in each of our four classrooms over the course of two years: Preschool East, for children 2.9 to 3.5 years old; Preschool West, for children 3.5 to 4.5 years old; Prekindergarten–Kindergarten, for children 4 to 5 years old; and Kindergarten–1st Grade, for children 5 to 6 years old (this had been a Grades 1–2 classroom and was converted to K–1 for the 2018–2019 school year).

Preschool East: Affirming the home–school connection

> Family involvement is part of the beauty of this place—a lot of thought and care to know about kids in and out. There are opportunities for kids to be who they are and opportunities for them to explore that and display it for others to see and learn from. The emergent curriculum—that allows teachers to be responsive to individual children. There are opportunities for teachers to engage. It's a different level of teaching that I have never experienced before.
>
> **—Vanessa Cid, head teacher, Preschool East**

The focus for the younger preschoolers is on the developing self as a member of an inclusive community. The child is guided from the security of family through a conscious process in which the child's emotional life is engaged with others and the natural world.

Guided by scholarship on family engagement (Gonzalez-Mena 2014), teachers ask themselves certain questions as they begin to build this community: Does the learning environment communicate who is in the community? Does the environment reflect what the children value as well as the learning process? Are the imprints of the children prominently on display (their photographs, their words, their creations)? Are all of the children's families being honored within the community? What

might the children's activities and demeanors communicate about how they feel about themselves?

Three-year-olds enter this community in diverse and individual ways, and they need support in developing healthy and productive ways of negotiating the social and physical environments. We provide opportunities for the children to learn how to share responsibilities, understand and communicate their needs, respond to the needs of others, advocate for themselves, and contribute to their community. Children feel part of a community when their identities and voices are validated within the fabric of classroom discussions and displays.

Anti-bias education supports children's personal and social identities within a complex and multicultural society.

One project we engage in early in the school year focuses on the self, family, and home so that the children begin cultivating the positive identities that are essential to the first goal of anti-bias education. In order to include others, one must feel included, so we begin with helping each child develop a secure self-concept.

Once the children have acclimated to participation in the program, the dramatic play area becomes each child's home for several days. The home and classroom are connected by allowing the children to "invite" their friends and teachers into their home (the dramatic play area). Children bring items from their homes that embrace their family's ambiance and culture. Items include blankets, pillows, picture books, empty food containers, tablecloths, paintings, photos, and durable ornaments and figurines. Families may also bring favorite music that is played in the home. Children explore these items in the dramatic play area as they "visit" each child's home. They get the opportunity to ask and answer questions and to honor and investigate each other's personal interests, family lives, and unique qualities such as languages and customs. These pretend homes are pathways for discovering their similarities while bridging differences.

Preschool West: Introducing a person of power

> Teaching activism empowers young people to make big changes in the world, even though they're small.
>
> **—Victor Bradley, head teacher, Preschool West**

Older preschoolers continue building strong connections with their peers and establish deeper understandings of themselves as they focus on the world beyond home and school. They are interested in their own power, friendships, and identities in relation to others. Children in the classroom study the lives of powerful people with whom they can identify. They

are then introduced to the notion of social justice through people of power who have had a positive impact on society.

The second, third, and fourth goals of anti-bias education are all central to this exploration of power. Teachers facilitate children's wonder and discovery of their individual identities across the curriculum in multiple ways. They ask essential questions like Where does your skin color come from?, What is beautiful?, and What is a family? Group meeting times include discussions, songs, stories, and poems. Teachers use read-alouds on faces, skin color, and families. They also introduce the classroom persona doll and often develop survey questions as part of getting to know one another.

For art, children create photo collages of themselves, draw body-size self-portraits, and construct mini versions and murals of their families and homes using recycled materials (corks, wooden beads, fabrics, shoeboxes, and photos). Children make playdough portraits, clay and plastic body parts, and skin color paint using spices and other natural materials such as cinnamon, coconut shells, sand, sunflower seed butter, chocolate, and clay. They build houses with blocks and talk about people in communities. As they consolidate this learning, children begin to engage in the larger world by examining how powerful people have a positive impact in communities.

Children are introduced to social justice through people of power who have had a positive impact on society.

One "Person of Interest" the preschoolers learned about was Cesar Estrada Chavez. The project started by reading the picture book *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez*, by Kathleen Krull, to help engage children in a dialogue about his lifelong dedication to improving the treatment and pay of farm workers. Children learned about the people and marches he led, the boycotts and hunger strikes he called for, and the national awareness he fostered about the dangers of pesticides for workers' health.

During the 12-week project, children learned about current events similar to those Chavez worked on, and they talked about boycotting and protesting. They decided to take action in support of migrant workers by focusing on one US fast food corporation's use of farm workers who have poor working conditions in Mexico. Children organized and marched through the school to educate everyone about boycotting the fast food chain. By connecting Chavez's work to current events, children learned that they can take action and make a difference, which plants the seeds of activism in support of social justice (Boutte 2008).

Prekindergarten–Kindergarten: Understanding gender identities and roles

> Hi, Hanna! I just wanted to thank you so much for your commitment to inclusion and anti-bias work at EPCS. Nick and I were sitting at [a large chain restaurant] drinking hot chocolate, when we noticed a person walk in and pause briefly before choosing between the men's and women's restrooms. Nick immediately asked, "What if you go by *they* or *them*? What bathroom do you use?" He talked about a few of his teachers and he wondered what they would do. We talked about it, and now he would like to write a letter to the CEO of [the chain restaurant] to suggest gender neutral restrooms. I know that none of this would have occurred to him if it hadn't been for the diversity of staff at EPCS and for their candor regarding their preferred gender identities. Thank you for this. We love EPCS so much, and sometimes its unique qualities really stand out—even outside of school!
>
> **—Rebecca, parent of a kindergartner**

In pre-K and kindergarten, children exhibit expanding social awareness, problem-solving ability, and understanding. They communicate their thoughts and feelings more confidently and skillfully as they engage in conflict resolution and begin to understand other people's perspectives. This classroom nurtures this growing awareness by instilling the notion that everyone has the right to feel "safe, strong, free, and

powerful" (Family Access of Newton 2017, n.p.). Biases are openly addressed as children are more able to participate in group dialogues about fairness, exclusion, and identity.

The concept of gender is one of the many interesting topics addressed in this classroom. Because children in the US are bombarded with messages about boys and girls, some questions seem to arise year after year Are pink and purple girl colors?, Why are the children playing in the block area mostly boys?, Why are children at the writing and drawing table mostly girls?, Are boys always loud?, Do girls play fighting games?, Is there a boy sink and a girl sink?, and Do you always have to be a girl or a boy? What does it mean if you don't?

The teaching team starts out by addressing these questions in daily activities. With time, teachers revisit the notion of everyone being "safe, strong, free, and powerful" and help children apply it to gender expression and identity. For teachers, this is also an opportune moment to take a step back and reflect on their own thoughts, behaviors, and language use (Chen, Nimmo, & Fraser 2009). For example, teachers recently discussed addressing children as "kindergartners" or "children" instead of "boys," "girls," or "guys." They also questioned their assumptions about who is loud and active in the classroom.

Focusing on the second and third goals of anti-bias education, the teachers decided collaboratively when and how to explicitly address gender expression and identity with the class. In the 2017–2018 school year, they initiated this work during circle time.

> At the beginning of circle time, the teacher, Lynne May, asks, "What toy do you like?" Various children respond: "LEGO," "Ninjago," "American Girl doll," and "Remote control monster truck." Lynne May asks, "Are there boy toys and girl toys?" At first, the children start identifying each toy as for boys or for girls. Lynne May charts their responses. But after each response, some children object. In response to Robby saying that dinosaurs are boy toys, Shelly says, "But I play with dinos too." Soon, all the toys are listed for both boys and girls.

> Then Lynne May introduces the term *stereotype*. "Girls have long hair, girls play with dolls, boys play with cars, pink is for girls, blue is for boys." She then elicits "I" statements (which are familiar to the children). Marsha says, "I like blue." Mac adds, "I have long hair." Several other children make I statements that contradict the stereotypes.

> Lynne May finishes circle time by reading and discussing *William's Doll*, by Charlotte Zolotow. During the story, the children begin to recognize that William's grandmother is his ally. Some smile when the grandmother buys William the doll he wants. Lynne May asks if anyone else would stand up and be William's ally. Almost everyone raises their arms, exclaiming, "I would!" Two children say they would be William's friend and play with him. One says she would get him a doll too.

Over the next several weeks, through planned and spontaneous questions and activities, the children came to understand gender expression and identity in a much less constrained way. They also became vocal about not being limited by old ideas regarding who they can be and what they can do.

> Before Lynne May adds some fancy dresses to the dramatic play center, she introduces the

items to the children during morning meeting. She begins with a story about the dresses (e.g., where they come from, whom they belonged to, and why she and the children now have them). Everyone seems interested. Lynne May also tells the children that the dresses can be worn by anyone in the classroom who would like to use them. She assures the children, "It is okay to be curious and to test your ideas." Eyes widen and bodies straighten up.

In the days and weeks that follow, both girls and boys wear the dresses in the dramatic play center. They gaze at their reflections with satisfied grins. They talk about which dresses they like best. One child, a boy, encourages a friend, another boy, to try on a dress. "Look, it is fun." He twirls around in his dress. His friend watches in amazement as the skirt collects air and rises majestically. His friend puts on a dress and twirls too.

Kindergarten–1st Grade: Participating in governance

> One of the most important skills we learn is how to be true to ourselves while also being thoughtful, responsible members of a group. This is what used to be called *citizenship*. Class Council was designed to give everyone—teachers and students alike—a chance to develop as citizens of their community.
>
> **—Matt Slepin, head teacher, K–1st Grade**

This classroom constructs an inclusive community in which all of the children and adults actively participate in leadership. While the teachers are still working toward all four anti-bias goals, they emphasize the empowerment in the fourth goal. Specifically, they nurture the children's emerging abilities to understand and generate policies that apply to the community.

For the past few years, this class has integrated a block of time called "Class Council." This is a weekly meeting for the entire group, lasting for 30-45 minutes. The students have opportunities to share and discuss challenges they are encountering at school and come together to make cooperative decisions on matters affecting the functioning of the class. So that all children can anonymously and privately report problems or issues to the council, they have a box—Cutey the Problem Box—in a secluded corner of the room, along with pencils and slips of paper saying, "I am having a problem with. . .". Problems are openly aired and discussed during Class Council.

The Class Council is introduced early in the year—approximately the third week—preceded by activities focused on community, decision-making, and teacher-facilitated investigations into students' concerns. Early in the year, the Class Council develops rules for the class and later, they create the roster of class jobs.

Some problems, discussions, and decisions require only a single session of the Council. However, weightier issues may occupy several sessions; they might also include special meetings, such as additional sessions outside of the regularly scheduled times or working sessions with smaller special committees. The issues are usually decided by means of majority voting, although broader items often involve several rounds of runoff voting. The results of Council actions are made public through classroom display (e.g., class job board, class rules display, weekly messages to families). Often, council meetings address conflicts among children, such as rejection, exclusion, and sharing of space or materials.

The children gather at the rug. Matt, the head teacher, calls the Council to order by rapping the gavel: "I hereby declare this October 21 meeting of the Class Council in session!"

The first issue discussed is lining up, a concern of both teachers and students. After about eight weeks of school, the class was experiencing the same issues when lining up: running and pushing to be next in line after the Line Leader, running and pushing to be last in line, and constantly struggling to stand next to preferred classmates.

Casey suggests that each student have an assigned spot in the line. This sparks a lively discussion of why they like or don't like the idea. Tommy and Lucy are concerned that the same people would have to be at the end of the line every day. Carrie suggests that they change the order each week.

When a vote is taken, the class is strongly in favor of the idea. Matt explains why he does not like the idea, but says that since a clear majority of the class wants to try and has given good reasons, it will be done.

Not long after this Class Council, it was apparent that line spots were exactly what this particular group needed to take the anxiety out of lining up. Examples like this may not seem relevant to anti-bias education on the surface, but by the end of the school year all of the children know how to identify and solve problems. They are well on their way to effectively standing up against prejudice and discrimination.

Family engagement and anti-bias curriculum

The school engages families through intentional and ongoing communication where the voices and needs of families are heard and addressed. This involves building strong home–school relationships, facilitating opportunities for engagement, community building, and parent leadership, and responding to the educational, social, and financial needs of children and families.

The Parent-Teacher Advisory Board oversees our annual agenda for family activities. In the 2017–2018 school year, the Advisory Board chose to focus on raising compassionate children, which is one of the school's core values. Two evening workshops for families and teachers were held, and kindness and compassion was also included (as one of four topics) in our two community discussion evenings. These evening workshops and discussions offer opportunities for families from differing backgrounds and beliefs to discuss topics ranging from developing healthy friendships to engaging with the natural world to mindfulness.

As is often the case, when the Advisory Board decided to focus on raising compassionate children, the children got involved too. They created "The Kindness Project" and engaged the community in defining the concept of kindness. They discussed it among themselves in their classroom and engaged teachers, administrators, and staff in dialogue about kindness, self-respect, and respect for others. They then compared what they learned with their initial notes and presented a summary of their findings to the Eliot-Pearson community—including their families.

Another way in which families are regularly involved—and our anti-bias work is deepened—is through direct family participation in the classroom. For example, although religious holidays are not celebrated at Eliot-Pearson, families in the older preschool classroom are routinely invited to come talk about how their families celebrate various holidays that are special to them. These events are recorded in the classroom newsletter and are shared with all the families (along with invitations to share how they celebrate in other ways).

Children's art, words, and work are curated and displayed throughout the center and via the school's website, encouraging family and community engagement and interaction. A variety of methods and approaches are used to share curriculum and students' work with families, such as weekly newsletters, password-protected classroom web pages, documentation panels, quarterly family breakfasts, portfolios, and parent conferences. These methods ensure access for all family members, drawing them into our rich learning and research about anti-bias education.

One of the most important events of the year is Significant Day. Children invite someone special in their lives other than a parent to visit their classrooms,

> Consideration of who is included, how they are included, and why everyone is included is the fabric of what we do at the school.

such as a grandparent, sibling, cousin, or family friend. We started Significant Day because one of the biases that early childhood programs in the US often exhibit toward diverse families is that of assuming a nuclear family. In fact, throughout the world, most children experience deep relationships with people other than a parent (Hrdy 2009). We at Eliot-Pearson see these relationships—which are sometimes referred to as

fictive kin—as essential to children's well-being in a diverse community. Through Significant Day, we celebrate family diversity.

Conclusion

At a troubling time in history when human rights and the natural world are under threat, early childhood educators are obligated to recognize their role in supporting the development of children so that, as adults, they are prepared to address global challenges. As much as it is our job to prepare children for school and to assure their emotional well-being, it is equally important for the profession to acknowledge our collective responsibility to foster kindness, compassion, and fairness (LeeKeenan & Nimmo 2016). Early childhood educators can accept the responsibility and opportunity to build a better society, one in which all its members are included. Teaching young children is a moral calling as much as it is a vocation.

In the 1970s, when the inclusion of children with special rights was not yet fully accepted, the Eliot-Pearson Children's School took on the challenge of full inclusion. It was an experiment—one that succeeded in establishing best practices in early childhood special education (Meisels 1977). Today, as the broader society struggles with the challenges of immigration, continued discrimination against people of color, and the reassessment of societal norms of gender expression and identification, Eliot-Pearson again accepts the challenge of full inclusion.

Diversity is not simply a fact at Eliot-Pearson; consideration of who is included, how they are included, and why everyone is included is an active part of the day-to-day curriculum, staff professional development, and family engagement. It is the fabric of what we do at the school. It gives us hope for the future of our diverse society.

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Finding a Place for the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Children and Their Families

An Anti-Bias Approach

John Nimmo, Mona M. Abo-Zena, and Debbie LeeKeenan

Tomas (4.5 years old): My dog died yesterday.

Martha (5 years old): Did he go to heaven?

Tomas: What? No, she got rein . . . reincarnated! She will come back as a snake.

Martha: I don't think that can really happen.

Later, Carla, Tomas and Martha's teacher, cautiously shares this conversation with families at pickup. Some express fascination, but several share concerns. One stated firmly, "We are not OK with you talking about these things at school."

Religion and spirituality are areas of identity that early childhood teachers often feel uncomfortable or uncertain talking about. And yet, we frequently hear children's big questions about the meaning of life and their wonderings about matters of faith: Who made the world? What happens when I die? Who made the first person on earth? What is God? These questions reflect children's everyday observations and the cultural messages they receive about the metaphysical world.

Spirituality involves going beyond the self in search of "connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution" (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude 2003, 205). Nell Noddings, an education scholar who has focused on philosophy, adds, "Religion is a specific way of exercising that spirituality that usually requires an institutional affiliation" (Halford 1998, 28). In this article, we explore the relevance and complexities of recognizing spirituality and religion in our work with children and families. First, we explore our field's reluctance to embrace religion in early childhood anti-bias and equity efforts. Next, we consider how this area of identity plays an integral role in development and culture. Finally, we share how religion and spirituality enter the classroom and provide strategies drawing on the frameworks of religious literacy and anti-bias education for discussing these topics with children. Throughout the article, we share brief examples drawn from our decades in early childhood education.

Why spirituality and religion are often avoided

Why do we view children's questions about spirituality and religion with trepidation? Because they are connected to our most fundamental individual and family values, we might feel that spirituality and religion are forbidden topics in education. Social norms often silence conversations about potentially divisive topics; maybe we are uncomfortable engaging with families—and even colleagues—about beliefs that may draw out deeply passionate responses. Some teachers believe—or accept—that children's observations and questions on these topics should be left solely to families. Families may view spirituality as integral to socializing and connecting their child to their community, or they may even wish to keep these values private.

No matter how we feel, children bring questions about spirituality and religion into the classroom, and we have to decide how to respond.

As educators, our fears might reflect a lack of knowledge about the faith traditions we may encounter in the classroom—or they might be grounded in uncertainty about our own spiritual identities and stories. Another possibility is that certainty about our faith may make it difficult for us to be open and understanding toward other belief systems. Regardless of their knowledge, beliefs, and values, some educators may be concerned about the constitutional separation of "church" and state espoused by constitutional law. These concerns often lead to a kind of paralysis on the part of the educator, because we confuse *practicing* a religion with *acknowledging* and *talking about* religion (AAR Religion in the Schools Task Force 2010). From a social justice perspective, religious identity may be difficult to acknowledge when these beliefs and their cultural interpretations come into conflict with an anti-bias commitment to the visibility of *all* families. Or, some educators may find they are so focused on resisting the ways that Christmas and other Christian traditions can so easily dominate life in the classroom that they miss the diversity and subtlety of other religious perspectives.

No matter how we feel, children bring questions about spirituality and religion into the classroom, and we have to decide how to respond. Not responding is still a potent response that can lead to misinformation and feelings of invisibility. So how do we react when a preschooler spontaneously starts a prayer circle in the classroom or lists Jesus along with Gandhi and Ellen Ochoa as her heroes? Thinking more broadly, how can we create meaningful relationships with

children and families if we are ignoring an aspect of their identities that can be central to who they are in the world? This is particularly important for families from marginalized groups, such as people of color, indigenous peoples, and families from immigrant or refugee backgrounds, who may turn to religion and spirituality as a way to affirm purpose and to counter bias and oppression (Abo-Zena & Rana 2015). There is a great deal we can do—even in publicly funded settings—without breaching constitutional boundaries by proselytizing or being biased in favor of or against any particular religious or spiritual perspective.

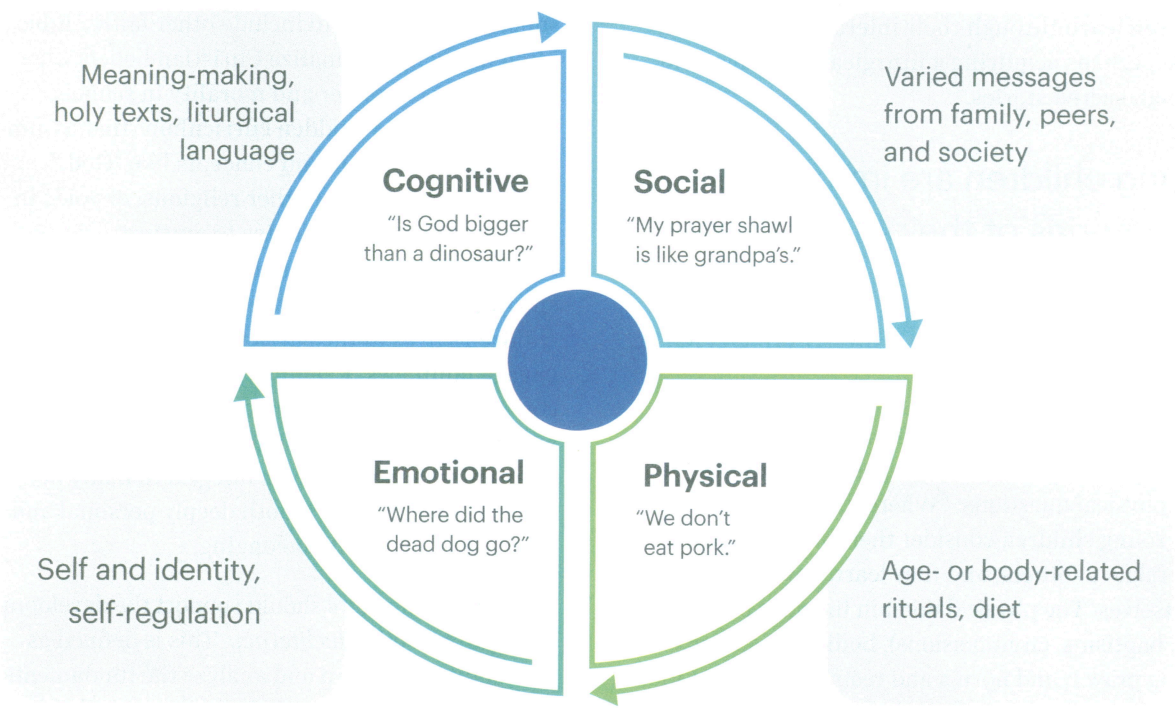
The significance to learning and development

> After classifying a rock as "living" on the living/nonliving worksheet and having the answer marked as wrong, a Native American first-grader internalizes the message that what he knows at home is not considered knowing at school.

Like other experiences or beliefs, spiritual and religious practices inform students' cultural knowledge. When teachers do not engage or are unprepared to recognize children's cultural knowledge, they may challenge learning in the classroom, as in the example of the child and the rock.

In her book *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades*, teacher Mary Cowhey (2006) offers another example. A crisis arose in her classroom when young children discovered ants in the snack area. While most students scurried and began stomping on the ants, the typically soft-spoken Som-Jet "opened his hands in a pleading gesture and raised his voice. 'No! Do not kill them! They are living things! Black ants do not bite people!'" (Cowhey 2006, 4). Som-Jet's intervention led to critical classroom conversations about the value of life, Buddhist beliefs, and comparisons with other faith traditions. Because Cowhey was willing to engage the children in deep explorations of different faiths, Som-Jet—and all of the other children—had their points of view validated. They also learned a great deal about others' belief systems. But in classrooms across the United States, students may feel either validated or silenced because of how their beliefs (or their lack of faith or faith traditions) align with practices in school.

Spiritual experiences have implications for many aspects of development and learning across the life span, particularly during early childhood. The figure below shows how spirituality impacts children across cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains, and how it may enter into the early childhood classroom.



Spirituality/Religion and Interlocking Developmental Domains

Ways of thinking are socially situated, and the particular context of children's spiritual experiences privileges certain types of learning and development along each of these developmental domains. Young children develop empathy for others—including ants—and develop affinities through religious behaviors: "My prayer shawl looks like grandpa's." Cognitively, children learn through their interactions with holy texts, perhaps acquiring a liturgical language, and through sacred stories.

Young children are immersed in the trajectories of their own religious communities, and many have windows into the beliefs of others.

Bridging cognitive and emotional domains, children try to make meaning through posing their own metaphysical questions: "Where did the dead bird go?" Young children consider their own identities as they relate to others, and they learn how to regulate themselves. The physical domain includes practices (e.g., baptisms, circumcisions), bodily movements during prayer, and norms and restrictions about food and drink (e.g., "We don't eat meat," "I helped cook our Seder meal"). Young children are immersed in the trajectories of their own religious communities, and many have windows into the practices and beliefs of others in their broader communities.

Consider Barbara, a Jewish kindergartner who, while sitting at the snack table, suddenly said, "Everyone who is Jewish raise your hand" (Paley 2000, 29). What do Barbara's impromptu survey and her preoccupation with her religious self-label and those of the people around her reflect about her sense of belonging? How may her experiences outside of school related to being Jewish affect her learning and development? Although Barbara was exploring her own religious identity and was affiliating with others she saw as similar, she did not realize how her behavior could result in others feeling left out. Interventions to promote religious literacy, discussed in the next section, may help to include all learners in the community.

Religious literacy and anti-bias goals

Young children are immersed in messages about religion—both positive and negative. This immersion includes the secularization of Christianity (the dominant religion in the United States) through holiday decorations and commercialization, despite superficial attempts to include other faiths. Educators often implicitly normalize Christian beliefs when referencing character and morality in schools, contributing to a "hidden curriculum" that assumes shared meanings around concepts like "God." Misinformation about other religions, or voids in their depictions, contributes to erasure, bias, and stereotypes. In educational settings, the omission of spirituality and religion limits our ability to reflect children's lives in the curriculum and to authentically engage familiews. Keeping these identities invisible constrains our ability to respond to bias, stereotyping, and misinformation. Using an anti-bias lens, we view spirituality and religion as integral to many people's cultures and identities, both deeply personal and central to community belonging.

We believe educators should support the development of children's *religious literacy*. This is defined as "the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural

life through multiple lenses" (Moore 2015, 4). In contrast, *religious illiteracy* leads to seeing religion solely as dogma without attention to context or culture. Variations within one religious tradition, or similarities among religions, are not acknowledged. Religious illiteracy diminishes respect for diversity, feeds stereotypes, and can result in religious extremism.

As both anti-bias educators and spirituality educators, we have applied a religious literacy lens to the four goals of anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards 2010, 3–6):

1. *Affirming identity*: Spirituality and religion are integral to many people's personal and social identities and are closely intertwined with family culture and child-rearing practices. We cannot ask children or families to leave out an essential part of who they are when they walk into the classroom. For instance, Ingrid, a 5-year-old with speech impediments, typically became more articulate when she talked about her family's church activities—a significant part of her life outside of school.
2. *Embracing diversity*: Families have different beliefs, and an anti-bias approach seeks to develop empathy. Even if something is not important to one person, it may be important to others. Religious diversity provides an opportunity to consider the similarities and differences in our beliefs and how they are practiced and celebrated. For example, most world religions have guidelines for what is considered just treatment or moral behavior, though they may vary in the details.
3. *Seeking justice*: Religious illiteracy creates stereotypes (e.g., all Christians celebrate Christmas in the same way, all Jews keep kosher) rather than seeing religious practices as diverse and dynamic. Some children may be aware of unjust issues in the news related to religion (e.g., attacks on places of worship) and bring their questions into the classroom. Their ideas may come in the form of misinformation they heard through media or adults. For instance, a kindergartner asked one of her classmates, "Why is your mom wearing a scarf on her head? Is she a terrorist?" We can help children recognize when people are stereotyped or treated unfairly due to ignorance and bias against their religion.
4. *Taking action*: Once children are able to recognize biased statements or when others are bullied because of what they believe or how they dress, we can develop caring communities that empower them to speak out and address bias.
5. As adults, we can create classroom agreements and center policies that are inclusive of spiritual and religious identities. For example, one early childhood center created a gift-giving policy that encouraged families to express their appreciation and affection through children's handmade cards in order to minimize both religious and socioeconomic marginalization.

Strategies for outside and inside the classroom

Guided by this framework of anti-bias education and religious literacy, the following strategies offer starting points for early childhood educators to stop fearing spirituality in the classroom.

Be an intentional teacher

As teachers, we need to begin by reflecting on our own spiritual experiences, biases, knowledge bases, and identities. Regardless of our beliefs, we should consider how these views could impact daily interactions, including our facilitation of classroom and family conversations. We should each ask ourselves, What do I share about my religious views with the children and families in my classroom? How can I be authentic and transparent with families while

also modeling respect for different beliefs? What are the boundaries between personal religious beliefs and professional responsibilities?

These questions include several complex considerations about how we view spirituality and religion in relation to who we are in the world. For instance, John's (coauthor) history with religion includes rejecting some of his family's Christian traditions. He realized this experience led to a difficulty in understanding how many families view religious beliefs as absolute, not as personal choices. On reflection, he has been able to use this realization to be more empathetic to the profound dilemmas some families face in being open to aspects of diversity.

Finding out about families' beliefs and identities fosters a culture of openness and learning together.

If I have visible markers of religious beliefs, such as wearing a hijab, cross, or yarmulke, how will I respond to children's inevitable questions? Some teachers feel pressured to self-censor their religious identities. For instance, a teacher who was absent from school because she was observing a Jewish High Holiday felt unable to share this information in response to children's curiosity. The result was less authenticity for the teacher in the classroom and a missed opportunity to cultivate diverse relationships with families.

Acknowledge religious funds of knowledge

Children come to school with beliefs, ideas, and practices about religion and spirituality that they have already acquired implicitly and explicitly from their families and communities. Teachers can acknowledge these religious *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al. 1992) as a significant contributor to developing relationships and building culturally responsive curriculum.

We find that the Community Cultural Wealth model (Yosso 2005) provides a helpful framework for examining how spirituality can be critical to understanding families and their strengths. This model highlights six types of capital that families have (in addition to financial resources). Here, we show how each type of capital offers a new lens on each person's spiritual identity.

- *Aspirational capital*—My faith gives me hope to succeed.
- *Linguistic capital*—My faith gives me access to texts and language for understanding and expressing spiritual concepts.
- *Family capital*—My faith offers my family shared values, purpose, and meaning.
- *Social capital*—My faith community connects me to a network of resources.
- *Navigational capital*—My faith helps me to navigate school policies and other institutional systems.
- *Resistant capital*—My faith helps me resist negative images about identity.

Teachers can recognize and build on these individual, family, and community assets in support of children's development. The separation of religion and the schools does not preclude teachers from learning about, and even connecting families to, community networks that reflect their particular faiths. As coauthors, we recognize how the faith traditions of our families of origin provided important strengths in our educational experiences. For instance, Debbie's (coauthor) mom, a Chinese immigrant, was introduced to Catholicism as a young child. This provided her with a community and an entry point to a new culture. Debbie found her mom's lifelong faith and belief system to be a resource for parenting, ethics, and support through challenging times.

Create curriculum with mirrors and windows

We use the metaphor of mirrors and windows (Style 1988; Bishop 1990) to think about the role of religious and spiritual identities in the curriculum. The materials (such as books, dolls, and posters) and activities in the classroom should reflect—or mirror—the demographics of the families, including their spiritual beliefs. When children see characters and images in books and other materials that look like them and their families, it builds their confidence and sense of self. When children do not see themselves, they may wonder, Is there something wrong with me? Where do I fit in? Mirrors could also include

cultural traditions like oral storytelling. In a preschool program with primarily Somali families, for example, the teachers invited parents to informally tell stories in Somali, with partial English interpretation, that included references to Islamic values and practices.

To build children's knowledge and understanding, the curriculum should also provide a window to religious diversity that the children and their families might not encounter every day. Books open windows to new experiences, ideas, and people. For example, provide children with books about Hinduism and Hindu culture, even if you do not know any Hindu families or people in your community. When we provide our children with mirrors and windows, children notice similarities and differences. A teacher used the book *Hats of Faith*, by Medeia Cohan, to discuss how many people share the practice of covering their heads in different ways to show love for God, reminding children that belief in "God" is not universal. Stress multiple perspectives and go beyond a single story of what a Muslim, Jew, Sikh, or other religious observer looks or acts like.

Encourage children to be curious and ask questions

Children will be curious about spirituality and religion when they see that adults pay attention to their feelings and words. For example, when Maria mentioned she got a new dress for Easter, teachers modeled being curious and asked Maria about her family celebration. Children's observations and questions may arise at unexpected times or may be provoked intentionally. For instance, if a child sees a synagogue on a community walk and asks, "What's that big star?," the teacher's role is to create the space for conversations and to then develop longer-term experiences based on the children's questions, knowledge, and development. In a kindergarten classroom at an urban university, the teachers listened to the children's questions about spirituality and religion, had discussions with families, and eventually developed a two-month study on beliefs that involved children interviewing a local priest, a Muslim chaplain, a rabbi, and an atheist about their beliefs (Mardell & Abo-Zena 2010). Teachers engaged families in the curriculum by sharing what was happening on an ongoing basis. After witnessing the curriculum, a parent said, "If kids can talk about religion and different beliefs, I should be able to too."

Develop your religious literacy

Finding out about families' beliefs and identities, including agnosticism and atheism, and listening to their questions fosters a culture of openness and learning together. Family and community members can be resources and experts on different religious experiences. Educators and schools have a responsibility to become informed about different religious practices. For instance, in one school, Muslim parents discovered that their children had been served pork in the school cafeteria and had been given candy rewards that contained pork products. Instead of accepting responsibility, the school chastised the parents for not noting the dietary restriction on the intake form. In a society as diverse as ours, some missteps are inevitable, but we hope educators will take such moments as opportunities to demonstrate a willingness to listen, learn, and find workable solutions.

Children's Books on Religion

- *Buddha at Bedtime: Tales of Love and Wisdom for You to Read with Your Child to Enchant, Enlighten and Inspire*, by Dharmachari Nagaraja (2008)
- *Ganesha's Sweet Tooth*, by Sanjay Patel and Emily Haynes (2015)
- *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors*, by Hena Khan, illus. by Mehrdokht Amini (2012)
- *Hats of Faith*, by Medeia Cohan, illus. by Sarah Walsh (2017)
- *Many Ways: How Families Practice Their Beliefs and Religions*, by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly (2006)
- *The Way to Start a Day*, by Byrd Baylor, illus. by Peter Parnall (1978)
- *Yaffa and Fatima: Shalom, Salaam*, by Fawzia Gilani-Williams, illus. by Chiara Fedele (2017)

Allow for conflicting views and embrace complexity

Discussing and being responsive to spirituality and religion can bring up differing and even controversial viewpoints. These viewpoints can lead to conflicts among colleagues, families, and children. Many differences, such as dietary restrictions, can be easily accommodated through inclusive policies. But what happens when values in one faith are opposed to values in another, or to your overall social justice mission? In these cases, administrators and educators can turn to *third space* problem-solving, "where people in conflict, through a distinct process of communication, reach agreement that goes beyond their initial positions . . . [and] draw on the creativity and openness of both parties" (Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, & Nimmo 2015, 118).

The goal in third space problem-solving is to go beyond either/or dichotomous thinking (in which one belief is right and the other is wrong) to embrace complexity. When children or families ask teachers questions, teachers often feel they need to give immediate and correct answers. In anti-bias work, we should feel able to say, "There is more than one way to think about it" or "It depends . . ." When we need time to think and get more information, we should acknowledge that: "That's a good question. Let's think more about it and we can talk again." Early childhood programs are prime places to learn how to have challenging and courageous conversations, how to disagree, and how to cooperate and solve problems together (LeeKeenan & Nimmo 2016).

In some situations, such as beliefs about gender and sexuality, it may not be possible to fully reconcile a family's religious views with a program's commitment to anti-bias education. While there are nonnegotiables when it comes to creating an anti-bias community where all families are visible and valued, we believe that most conflicts can at least be opportunities for learning and exchange if respectful relationships have been established.

Conclusion

No one said it was easy to find a place for religious and spiritual identities in our work. Indeed, one of the reasons we authors came together to focus on religious identity was because we each saw a rocky terrain with no clear pathway to negotiate the territory. Similar to anti-bias efforts across other social identities, we need to be ready for the ambiguity and wonder of human behavior. We acknowledge that religion and spirituality cannot be understood without recognizing the ways in which it intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, indigenous and immigrant status, and other social and historical factors. We see the urgency for change in the recent rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and in the targeting of places of worship across religions (FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program 2018). We also see the enormous potential to engage families more authentically, to honor young children's spiritual lives, and to take a stand against injustice.

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Diverse Children, Uniform Standards

Using Early Learning and Development Standards in Multicultural Classrooms

Jeanne L. Reid, Catherine Scott-Little, and Sharon Lynn Kagan

Ms. Robinson, a teacher in a pre-K classroom, places a variety of materials on the floor and asks her students to solve a problem. Using any of the materials they want, can they build a bridge across the space between two tables? The purpose of the activity is to foster the children's problem-solving skills, sustained attention, and social and communication

skills—areas of development described in the Early Learning and Development Standards Ms. Robinson uses to guide her teaching.

As Ms. Robinson observes the children, she sees that some are building on their own while chatting with their peers about unrelated topics; some are watching their peers and then quietly trying to build their own bridge; and still others are exchanging ideas with peers and then building a bridge together. Are the children who are working together not able to do the task alone, or are they demonstrating collaborative skills? Are the children who are trying to do it alone unable to seek help from their peers, or are they demonstrating individual initiative? Are the children who are chatting about other topics distracted from the task, or are they demonstrating social skills? Are the children who are silent lacking the verbal skills to engage their peers, or are they demonstrating keen attention skills? What can Ms. Robinson learn about the children in this context?

This example demonstrates how thoughtful teachers seek to understand children's behaviors, motivations, approaches to learning, and individual differences. In an early educational environment characterized by youngsters from increasingly diverse backgrounds, teachers know that children differ and seek to tailor their teaching to build on children's behaviors, preferences, prior experiences, and funds of knowledge. Fully understanding children's words and actions in the classroom, which are shaped by the many assets they bring with them from their unique cultural experiences, is a goal that practitioners and scholars are pursuing with new intensity (NASEM 2018).

In addition to understanding children's different approaches to learning, almost all teachers of infants through prekindergartners are also expected to follow their state's Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS), which define uniform expectations for what children should know and be able to do before kindergarten. Standards commonly describe, for example, how children should demonstrate initiative in the classroom, how they should focus their attention on tasks and activities, and how they should use verbal skills with their peers. Yet, as we see in Ms. Robinson's class, the ways children express knowledge and skills differ, and these differences may have roots in how children have been socialized to organize their own learning.

This article explores one critical dimension of such differences: the role that culture plays in affecting how children learn. In particular, this article considers some specific areas of children's learning commonly addressed in ELDS, with an eye toward how they do—and do not—honor cultural diversity. Many teachers are already aware of the importance of learning about children's and families' different social norms, such as the appropriateness of making or avoiding eye contact with adults.

Culture plays a critical role in how children learn across multiple developmental domains.

But recent research on the cultural nature of early learning has shown that cultural variation affects not only social norms but also how children learn across multiple developmental domains. Significant advances have been made in our understanding of how children from different cultural backgrounds vary in how they focus their attention, organize themselves to learn, and engage in classroom activities. When these advances are not well represented in ELDS, the expectations described in ELDS may disadvantage children from some cultural groups.

Drawing from a multidisciplinary review of theoretical and empirical research (Reid, Kagan, & Scott-Little 2017), this article provides examples of findings that are highly relevant to teachers who use ELDS as they work with children who have increasingly diverse cultural identities. After summarizing our review, which encompassed hundreds of articles, books, and

reports in multiple disciplines, including anthropology and developmental, social, educational, and cross-cultural psychology, we describe several dimensions of cultural variation in children's learning that are particularly applicable to the content of ELDS. We then discuss how teachers can employ this knowledge to promote culturally responsive practice when using ELDS with the diverse children they serve.

The cultural nature of learning and development

Culture has traditionally been thought of as a set of values, beliefs, norms, and practices shared by a group of people and communicated from one generation to the next. While we often focus attention on the markers of culture that are easy to see, such as food, fashion, holidays, language, crafts, and music, recent scholarship has focused more on the invisible workings of culture as an inherent part of the process of learning and development (Rogoff 2003; Bang 2015). With this perspective, culture influences not only children's personal preferences and behaviors but also how they think, feel, and learn. Instead of seeing culture as an external influence on children, it is viewed as a process in which children use cultural "tools" or "artifacts" (values, symbols, objects, technologies, words, norms, traditions, schemas, scripts, and practices) to make meaning of their daily experiences. Culture and the development of cognition are therefore inseparable (Sasaki & Kim 2017).

Children learn from their cultural experiences and use that learning in a unique way to develop a new understanding of the world.

Culture, no longer viewed as a stable set of values and traditions, is now understood as a "constellation of practices" and tools that children use to understand the world and that are then changed by their use, as children adapt them for their own purposes (Rogoff, Najafi, & Mejía-Arauz 2014). This means that children learn from their cultural experiences, but also that each child uses that learning in a unique way to develop a new understanding of the world. In addition, culture is no longer thought of as a label that is rooted in a child's race, ethnicity, or country of origin, such as "Black" or "Hispanic." Rather, a child's culture is a rich set of practices and tools acquired from the many cultural communities each child navigates (e.g., home, child care, preschool, neighborhood, doctors' offices, and religious institutions). Although racial and ethnic groups share common values and traditions (and are often referenced in research on cultural variation), each child's unique mix of multiple cultural experiences shapes that child's individual development. Culture is thus a dynamic and complex process, in which cultural perspectives vary at the individual level.

Examples of cultural differences in learning

Empirical research has advanced our understandings of how diverse cultural heritages influence *what* and *how* children learn. For example, many children in cultures indigenous to the Americas, particularly those with less exposure to schooling in the United States, are accustomed to learning through observation. In these cultures, children develop the ability to sustain keen attention to the activities of others, even as they sit and watch from outside of those activities. This is called "third-party attention" (López et al. 2010). They may be skilled at paying attention to more than one activity at the same time as they learn and then communicating nonverbally with their peers to collaborate (Mejía-Arauz et al. 2007). While it might appear that they are merely watching others, children with this cultural heritage may be particularly skilled at using observation to gain new skills and knowledge.

In contrast, children from Anglo-American and Asian backgrounds may be more accustomed to paying close attention to instructions from the teacher and then working on their own to demonstrate new skills or knowledge (Luo, Tamis-LeMonda, & Song 2013; Shneidman et al. 2016). Anglo-American children may also be more likely to interrupt others' activities to seek help with a task, while children from North American indigenous families may be accustomed to avoiding interruptions in favor of silent observation,

and children from Asian families may tend to wait patiently for adult assistance (Luo, Tamis-LeMonda, & Song 2013; Ruvalcaba et al. 2015).

Cultural differences also extend to the ways that children initiate learning activities. Children raised with an Anglo-American heritage may be likely to initiate activities that reflect their own interests, while children who have been guided by Asian cultural traditions may be more likely to defer to the leadership of adults (Ng et al. 2012; Luo, Tamis-LeMonda, & Song 2013). In another cultural approach, children from North American indigenous communities may show initiative by volunteering to help with activities, such as chores, that are done together for the benefit of the group. This pattern undermines long-standing beliefs that children from cultures emphasizing communal endeavors are not expected to act upon their own initiative (Alcalá et al. 2014).

Such findings show that culture is more complex than a simple binary divide between "individualist" vs. "interdependent" cultures (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier 2002; Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2008; Trommsdorff 2011). Although a dichotomous view of culture can be valuable in general terms, both orientations coexist in most, if not all, communities. For example, while children might demonstrate initiative in different ways, the value placed on "personal autonomy" or "agency," defined as the freedom to "do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values [a person] regards as important," transcends cultural communities (Sen 1985, 203). Working with a sample of four ethnic groups in the United States (Chinese American, African American, Mexican American, and European American), one study found that parents in all groups rated "agency and self-direction" as the most important goals for their children, above alternatives such as "benevolence and prosocial," "tradition and conformity," and "relatedness" (Suizzo 2007). The notion that personal autonomy is found only within individualistic cultures is no longer supported by the literature.

Together, these findings challenge educators to rethink assumptions about the meaning of children's learning behaviors during classroom activities. For example, teachers could be mistaken if they assume that children who are paying attention to their peers' activities are therefore not attending to their own work. These children may feel that quiet and keen observation is a familiar—and highly effective—learning strategy. Similarly, children who patiently defer to adult leadership may be no less eager to satisfy their curiosity and explore their own ideas than their more vocal peers.

Cultural variation and ELDS

Paradoxically, as our understandings of the diversity in children's learning and development have advanced, ELDS that seek to standardize learning outcomes are increasingly used to guide the content of teaching and learning in early childhood settings. Within the United States, every state has adopted ELDS for preschool-age children, and almost all states have ELDS for infants and toddlers (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance 2017). ELDS have become one cornerstone of a systematic approach to early childhood education quality in the United States, guiding curricular and assessment decisions, pedagogy, and professional learning. Yet how can teachers use these standards in classrooms with ever more variation in the ways their children learn? How can teachers be guided by ELDS without standardizing their teaching?

To consider these questions, we have identified specific dimensions of child development that are both commonly addressed within ELDS and particularly subject to cultural differences in how they are expressed. The areas relate to standards commonly found in ELDS that are often broadly defined with limited descriptions of how children demonstrate the skills when, in reality, children from varied cultural backgrounds may demonstrate mastery with a variety of behaviors. As such, the descriptions in ELDS may tilt the lens on what is considered typical or appropriate behavior that demonstrates the standard.

Here, we highlight three particular dimensions of development that reflect fundamental differences in how children with diverse cultural experiences organize their learning and are related to the developmental expectations typically found in ELDS. These dimensions are intended to provide a starting point for teachers who wish to consider—and perhaps reconsider—the varied behaviors they see within culturally diverse classrooms and the ways expectations for children's behaviors are expressed within their state ELDS.

Dimension 1: Concentration and attention control

- Children who are accustomed to learning by observing may be more likely to keep track of multiple events seemingly simultaneously, while other children may be more likely to focus their attention on one event at a time.
- Some children may be skilled at demonstrating a narrow focus of attention when presented with an object or activity, while other children may divide their attention to consider contextual information about objects and activities.
- Some children may pay close attention to their peers when they are learning, while other children may direct their attention to a teacher and then to their own work.
- Children who may not appear to be paying attention to an activity such as a read aloud may in fact be paying close attention while their eyes—and even their bodies—wander.

Dimension 2: Initiative and persistence

- Children from cultural contexts that emphasize individual initiative may eagerly begin interactions with peers and adults, while children from cultures that emphasize deference to the leadership of adults may prefer to wait for them to initiate social interactions.
- Some children may speak up quickly when they need help, while others may wait for assistance and show a great deal of persistence in trying to solve a problem on their own.
- Children who are accustomed to a cooperative approach to learning may demonstrate initiative by helping with group projects, while children who are accustomed to a more individual approach may initiate activities that reflect their own interests.

Dimension 3: Curiosity and exploration

- Some children may satisfy their curiosity within adult-directed activities, while others may demonstrate curiosity and motivation to learn by asking lots of questions and exploring the environment on their own.
- Some children may eagerly approach teachers with questions, demonstrating their expressive communication skills and motivation to learn, while others may exercise a more restrained approach, waiting to hear what teachers say and do.
- Children who are accustomed to a cooperative approach to learning may be motivated to learn by mutual affection and pride in their group, while children who have been socialized to value individual accomplishments may be motivated to learn more by personal acclamation and reward.
- Children who have been socialized to direct their own learning may be more likely to demonstrate their motivation to read by exploring books on their own, while children accustomed to more communal approaches may be more likely to engage with books in concert with their peers.

While ELDS have become an important guide for instruction in early childhood classrooms, there has been only limited consideration of how highly susceptible they are to potential cultural biases. For example, a standard that describes the expectation

that children sustain their attention despite distractions from peers may privilege a cultural perspective that values self-contained, individual learning over more collaborative learning. Children from more collaborative cultures may understand that observing peers and attending to their ideas is an integral part of paying attention and learning. Another example might be a standard that includes the expectation that children demonstrate a willingness

All Early Learning and Development Standards have a cultural perspective.

to try new things by suggesting or beginning a new activity on their own; this privileges a cultural perspective that values children trying new things independently over one that favors children trying new things within activities structured by adults. To identify effective teaching practices, educators may need to reconsider the content of the standards, indicators, and the examples that often accompany them in light of new understandings regarding the cultural ways that children learn.

Implications for culturally responsive practice

A clear implication of these new understandings is the need to recognize that all ELDS have a cultural perspective. Moreover, there is an urgent need to help teachers use standards more effectively with children from diverse heritages.

Here, we offer three steps teachers can take to use standards in a more culturally responsive way.

1. Develop a deeper understanding of how culture shapes learning
2. Learn meaningfully and systematically from parents and families
3. Examine state ELDS to consider how standards may reflect cultural biases.

Develop a deeper understanding of how culture shapes learning

To use ELDS in culturally diverse classrooms, teachers may need to have a deep understanding of how culture and learning are intertwined. To this end, teachers can learn about the cultural nature of early learning, learn about themselves, and learn about the children in their classrooms.

First, supported by professional learning opportunities, teachers can gain new understandings of culture as an array of dynamic tools and practices (rather than a stable entity) that helps children make meaning of experiences in the context of multiple communities and activities. One helpful conceptual frame considers children's development as a process of both learning and "becoming," in which children employ multiple and varied cultural practices to form and re-form their identities well beyond the confines of any inherent race or ethnicity (Nasir & Hand 2006). Teachers who learn more about this new understanding of culture will be better prepared to use ELDS in a culturally responsive way.

Second, supported by professional learning opportunities, teachers need to identify their own cultural perspectives, which may unconsciously shape their pedagogy, practice, and the ways they evaluate children's behavior and progress. This is what teachers, as professionals, do every day: They discern what children know and can do and, perhaps guided by the expectations of ELDS, devise ways to help them progress. Yet they do so through their own cultural lens. Recognizing the dimensions of this lens and how it may—or may not—fit with what research tells us about how culturally diverse children learn is a critical step toward being an effective teacher in a diverse classroom.

Third, teachers need to study each child to gain an understanding of each one's cultural experiences and development. Beyond simply respecting or acknowledging cultural differences, teachers need to build upon the varied cultural assets they may see within and among children. The critical foundation for this learning is a secure and trusting relationship with each child, which allows teachers to gain insights into children's perspectives, to bridge any cultural differences, and to adapt practice in ways that equitably foster all children's learning (Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, & Garcia 2009; Howes 2016). Once again, professional learning opportunities should support teachers' abilities to form such relationships with all children.

Learn meaningfully and systematically from parents and families

To work with children in ways that truly build on, rather than minimize, their cultural experiences, teachers can create rich and diverse opportunities to learn from parents and families. Family members can serve as cultural guides, helping teachers gain deep understandings of children's cultural capital, the family's values, and the learning goals the family feels are important. These, in turn, can be used in the classroom to inform pedagogy and support children's positive identity development as well as their learning (Durden, Escalante, & Blitch 2015). Conceptualizing family members as bidirectional partners in planning learning experiences for children can be challenging for teachers when parents' values may seem to be at odds with what teachers consider best practice (Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Adair 2013; Brown & Lan 2015). Even so, authentic collaboration is critical to effective pedagogy because without it, teachers have lost a primary resource to understand how children learn best and may face resistance from parents to the educational objectives they are pursuing.

Beyond respecting cultural differences, teachers need to build upon children's varied cultural assets.

Nurturing constructive partnerships with families requires more than making them feel welcome in the classroom. Teachers (and other program staff) should initiate frequent communication with families, supporting family members as decision makers about goals and learning experiences for their children (Halgunseth et al. 2009). This means that teachers should use multiple strategies to engage parents and families, such as weekly "curriculum letters" that describe daily activities in the classroom, invitations to share their cultures in the classroom,

questionnaires for all primary caregivers, phone calls to family members to exchange ideas about a child's behaviors and accomplishments, progress reports, and family conferences. Teachers can also help family members learn about and understand the ELDS that guide what and how they are teaching. Families need to understand the teaching practices used in the classroom and how they are being adapted to their children, particularly if the practices differ from their own approach at home.

Examine state ELDS to consider cultural biases

With new knowledge about the cultural nature of early learning and the children in their classrooms, teachers can review the content of ELDS for standards or indicators that might be culturally laden and consider how any potential biases might support or deter the learning of their students. More specifically, teachers can review ELDS to discern, and perhaps reconsider, how they apply to children from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Armed with this perspective, teachers can then plan different types of learning experiences, consistent with the expectations within ELDS, that will engage diverse children and provide robust opportunities to promote their learning. For example, teachers may rethink normative assumptions of how children engage with literacy activities, such as by having their eyes on the teacher during a read aloud and eyes and pencil on the paper during journaling (Souto-Manning, Dernikos, & Yu 2016). Instead, children might be given opportunities to move on the rug, exchange ideas with peers, and let their eyes wander. In these and other ways, teachers can adapt the expectations in ELDS to the cultural assets of the learners in their classrooms.

In summation, to use ELDS in a multicultural classroom without standardizing the curriculum, teachers need to become aware of the current thinking about the importance of culture in children's development and use research-guided adaptations in their pedagogy and practice. With fresh perspectives on the content of ELDS and the children, families, and themselves, teachers can find new ways to create time and space for all children to think and act on their ideas. In a community of diverse learners, when difference is celebrated, learning can increase. ELDS must therefore be carefully used with a thorough understanding of the cultural nature of learning.

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NAEYCNEWS

The latest from the National Association for the Education of Young Children

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Becoming Our Own Best Advocates

Amy O'Leary

Over the summer, the US women's soccer team won the FIFA Women's World Cup for the fourth time. While this was an incredible accomplishment, the team also raised important issues on their path to victory.

E-QUAL PAY! E-QUAL PAY! E-QUAL PAY! Thousands of fans chanted as the women's team celebrated on the field after beating the Netherlands in the final game. The chants continued as fans lined the streets of New York City for the ticker tape parade. The pay equity issue was highlighted throughout the month-long World Cup—coverage was all over social media, on the front pages of daily newspapers, and in financial papers and magazines. Players spoke out, elected officials took action, and the various professional soccer organizations and associations had to take a stand.

DE NUESTRA PRESIDENTA

Seamos nuestros propios mejores defensores

Amy O'Leary

Durante el verano de 2019, el equipo de futbol femenino de EE.UU. ganó por cuarta vez la Copa Mundial femenina de FIFA. Este logro es increíble, pero el equipo también planteó cuestiones importantes en su camino a la victoria.

¡SA-LA-RIO I-GUAL! ¡SA-LA-RIO I-GUAL! fue el grito de miles de fanáticas y fanáticos mientras el equipo femenino celebraba su victoria en la cancha tras derrotar al equipo holandés en el partido final. Los gritos continuaban mientras los fans ocuparon las aceras de las calles de la Ciudad de Nueva York para el desfile en honor a las futbolistas. La cuestión de equidad de salario se destacaba

As the Huffington Post reported,

> The gender pay gap that has long plagued women's soccer has been thrust into the spotlight in recent years as players from all over the world have demanded parity from FIFA, the international governing body of soccer. The difference between prize money for men and women is stark. This year's Women's World Cup has $30 million in prize money available, The New York Times reported, whereas the 2018 World Cup for men had $400 million available. (https://bit.ly/2POCDt4)

The July 7 article continues, "FIFA is not the only soccer organization that fails to compensate women equally. Last week, more than 50 members of Congress wrote to the U.S. Soccer Federation to demand it pay the women's team fairly, considering female soccer players receive a base salary of roughly $30,000 less than their male counterparts."

On July 11, after the victory celebrations were over, Ashley Reese wrote an article for Jezebel.com, "A World Cup Champion Also Struggles to Afford Childcare." The piece highlights Jessica McDonald, who shares,

durante todo el mes de la Copa Mundial; el tema se trataba en todos los medios sociales, en las portadas de periódicos diarios y en revistas y otras publicaciones del mundo de las finanzas. Las atletas se expresaron, funcionarios del gobierno actuaron y las diversas entidades profesionales del fútbol tuvieron que tomar posiciones.

Según un artículo en Huffington Post,

> En años recientes ha surgido como foco de atención la brecha salarial de género que lleva mucho tiempo asolando el fútbol femenino, ya que atletas de todo el mundo han exigido la igualdad a FIFA, la junta gobernante internacional del fútbol. Hay una brecha dramática entre el dinero de premio que reciben los atletas masculinos y las femeninas. Este año la Copa Mundial femenino ofrece $30 millones de dólares en dinero de premio, según informó el periódico New York Times, mientras que la Copa Mundial de los hombres de 2018 ofrecía un total de $400 millones. (https://bit.ly/2POCDt4)

El artículo del 7 de julio pasa a decir: "FIFA no es la única entidad del fútbol que no logra compensar igualmente a las mujeres. En la última semana más de 50 congresistas dirigieron una carta a U.S. Soccer Federation para exigir que pague justamente al equipo femenino, en vista de que las futbolistas reciben un salario base de aproximadamente $30,000 menos que los futbolistas masculinos".

El 11 de julio, tras el fin de las celebraciones de la victoria, Ashley Reese redactó un artículo para Jezebel.com con el título "Una campeona de la Copa Mundial también lucha por costear el cuidado de niños". El artículo destaca a Jessica McDonald, quien cuenta:

> I'm the only mom on the national team [USWNT]. And then amongst the National Women's Soccer League [NWSL], there are seven of us. It's so hard, oh my God. The best way I can describe it is that it takes a lot of mental toughness. Of my career in the NWSL, I've only played one season where I wasn't a mom. Trying to figure out a routine is probably the hardest thing, and because I got traded a lot, I had to find new babysitters and child care all the time. **Child care in particular was very difficult, because it's expensive and we don't get paid much. If I put [my son] in a daycare, that's my entire paycheck, you know?** (https://bit.ly/30phbys; emphasis in original)

Does that sound familiar? I was struck by how the equal pay story was so prominent during the World Cup, yet the piece about childcare struggles came out after the competition was over. It seemed like an afterthought, which is sometimes how we see early care and education positioned in the news.

We have all heard the statistics about how expensive early care and education is for families with young children. In fact, Child Care Aware of America and the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment collaborated to produce a short video that answers the question in its title: "Why Do Parents Spend So Much on Child Care, Yet Early Childhood Educators Earn So Little?" You can see the video and read more information here: https://bit.ly/2z71RuZ.

To be a good advocate, you need to be informed. This video helps to break down the complex issues of funding streams, business models, and the economics of early education and provides a wonderful platform from which to continue this important conversation.

> Yo soy la única mamá en el equipo nacional [USWNT, siglas en inglés]. Y luego entre National Women's Soccer League [NWSL], somos siete. Es tan difícil, Dios mío. La única manera en que puedo describirlo es que te requiere mucha resistencia mental. De mi carrera en NWSL, jugué una sola temporada en que no era mamá. Probablemente lo más difícil es tratar de arreglárselas para hacer una rutina, y como me cambiaban mucho a otros equipos, siempre tenía que encontrar a nuevas niñeras y guarderías. **Era muy difícil en particular con las guarderías, ya que son caras y no nos pagan mucho. Si yo inscribiera a [mi hijo] en una guardería, cuesta todo mi cheque, ¿sabes?** (https://bit.ly/30phbys; énfasis en el artículo original)

¿Le suena a usted? Me sorprendía lo prominente del tema de igualdad de salarios durante la Copa Mundial; pero se editó el artículo sobre las luchas con el cuidado infantil después del final de la competición. Parecía una ocurrencia tardía, como vemos a veces el tratamiento del cuidado y educación infantil en los medios informativos.

Todos hemos escuchado las estadísticas sobre lo muy caro que es el cuidado y educación infantil para las familias con hijos pequeños. De hecho, Child Care Aware of America y el Centro para el Estudio del Empleo en el Cuidado Infantil (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment) colaboraron en la producción de un video breve que contesta la pregunta de su título: "¿Por qué gastan tanto los padres y madres por el cuidado infantil, mientras que los educadores de niños pequeños ganan tan poco?" Se puede ver el video y leer más información aquí: https://bit.ly/2z71RuZ.

Para ser buen defensor, hay que informarse. Este video explica las cuestiones complejas de las fuentes de fondos, los modelos de negocio y los aspectos económicos de la educación infantil. Es un punto de partida excelente de donde continuar esta conversación importante.

To be a good advocate, you need to be informed and share your story.

Another important piece of advocacy is sharing your story. Imagine if educators and parents watched this video together and then had the opportunity to share their personal stories and reflections.

Imagine how much more parents would know about all the hard work and preparation it takes to provide a high-quality experience for their children. Imagine if parents were able to better understand how many early childhood educators are going back to school, taking classes, earning degrees, finding mentors, and improving their practice while (in most cases) barely making minimum wage, going without health insurance, and working another job to make ends meet. Imagine if parents could share their hopes and dreams for their children, explain why sometimes it is difficult to hear about when their child has a hard day, or express their worries about making good decisions for their child.

Parents and educators could be stronger allies in advocacy—fighting for investments in early education and in educators.

Imagine if parents and educators could be stronger allies in advocacy—fighting for greater investments in early education and in educators together. Imagine the rallies at state houses across the country with signs: "Parents can't afford to pay. Teachers can't afford to stay. Public investment is the way."

But we don't have to only imagine! We can do this. We need to speak up, ask our elected officials to take action, and join NAEYC and take a stand. Let's remember NAEYC's core beliefs from our Strategic Direction and use them as our guide: excellence and innovation, transparency, reflection, equity and opportunity, and collaborative relationships.

Otro componente importante de la abogacía es el de contar su propia historia. Imagínese si los educadores, padres y madres vieran este video juntos y luego tuvieran la oportunidad de contar sus historias y reflexiones personales. Imagínese al gran aumento en lo que sabrían los padres sobre todo el trabajo y la preparación que requiere la provisión de una experiencia de alta calidad para sus hijos. Imagínese si los padres entendieran mejor cuántos educadores de niños pequeños se inscriben en clases, estudian para ganar títulos, se buscan mentores y mejoran sus prácticas a la vez que (en la mayoría de los casos) ganan poco más que el sueldo mínimo, prescinden del seguro médico y mantienen otro empleo para ganarse la vida. Imagínese si los padres y madres pudieran expresar sus esperanzas y sueños para sus hijos, explicar por qué es difícil a veces escuchar que el día le ha ido mal a su niño o expresar sus preocupaciones sobre tomar buenas decisiones para su hijo.

Imagínese si los padres, las madres y los educadores pudiéramos ser aliados más fuertes en la abogacía—luchando juntos por inversiones mayores en la educación infantil y en los educadores. Imagine las manifestaciones ante las legislaturas estatales en todas partes del país, con letreros que dijeran: "Los padres no pueden costear el precio. Los maestros no pueden aguantar el bajo sueldo. ¡Con la inversión pública sí se puede!"

¡Podemos hacer más que imaginar! Podemos realizarlo. Tenemos que expresarnos, pedir a nuestros funcionarios gubernamentales actúen, inscribirnos en NAEYC y tomar posiciones. Vamos a recordar las creencias fundamentales de NAEYC de nuestra Dirección Estratégica y utilizarlas: excelencia e innovación, trasparencia, reflexión, equidad y oportunidad, y relaciones colaborativas.

Durante el próximo año, ustedes tendrán oportunidades de narrar su historia; ayudar a lograr un censo exacto que cuente a todos los niños; darles poder a padres y educadores en su comunidad para que voten; y unirse a

Core Beliefs

- Excellence and Innovation—We are imaginative risk takers willing to challenge assumptions while being accountable to our mission and fiscally responsible.
- Transparency—We act with openness and clarity.
- Reflection—We consider multiple sources of evidence and diverse perspectives to review past performance, note progress and successes, and engage in continuous quality improvement.
- Equity and Opportunity—We advocate for policies, practices, and systems that promote full and inclusive participation. We confront biases that create barriers and limit the potential of children, families, and early childhood professionals.
- Collaborative Relationships—We share leadership and responsibility in our work with others. We commit time and effort to ensure diverse participation and more effective outcomes. We act with integrity, respect, and trust.

For more information on NAEYC's values, beliefs, and mission, visit NAEYC.org/about-us/people/mission-and-strategic-direction.

Over the next year, you will have opportunities to share your story; to help ensure an accurate census that counts all kids; to empower parents and educators in your community to vote; and to join conversations on social media and in town halls with parents and colleagues across the United States.

Join us—as the advocates you are and must be—to insist that our country deliver on the promise of high-quality early childhood education for our children, families, and communities.

Convicciones fundamentales

- Excelencia e innovación. Somos imaginativos a la hora de asumir riesgos y estamos siempre dispuestos a desafiar supuestos, sin perder de vista nuestra misión y obligaciones fiscales.
- Trasparencia. Actuamos con claridad y franqueza.
- Reflexión. Tenemos en cuenta múltiples fuentes de pruebas y diferentes perspectivas al momento de examinar nuestras acciones pasadas, tomar nota de los avances y los éxitos alcanzados y comprometernos a lograr una mejora continua de la calidad.
- Equidad y oportunidad. Somos partidarios de las políticas, prácticas y sistemas que fomentan una participación plena e inclusiva. Hacemos frente a los prejuicios que generan barreras y limitan el potencial de los niños, las familias y los profesionales de la primera infancia.
- Relaciones de colaboración. Compartimos la responsabilidad y el liderazgo en nuestro trabajo con los demás. Dedicamos tiempo y esfuerzo a garantizar una participación diversa y resultados más eficaces. Actuamos con integridad, respeto y confianza.

Para más información sobre los valores, las creencias y la misión de NAEYC, visite NAEYC.org/about-us/people/mission-and-strategic-direction.

conversaciones en los medios sociales y en reuniones al estilo "town hall" con padres y colegas en todas partes de los Estados Unidos.

Únase a nosotros—como los defensores que son y tienen que ser—para insistir en que nuestro país cumpla la promesa de una educación infantil de alta calidad para nuestros niños, familias y comunidades.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

Radical Transformation in Higher Education Is Required to Achieve Real Equity

Rhian Evans Allvin | *Chief Executive Officer*

In the nearly three years since Power to the Profession (P2P) launched, there has been no more hotly contested debate than whether a bachelor's degree should be required for all early childhood educators. In the P2P Task Force's unifying framework, the recommendation is a three-level profession—Early Childhood Educator (ECE) I, II, and III. While all three require specialized early education preparation, they differ in terms of the extent of the training and resulting professional roles and responsibilities. ECE I consists of 120 hours of post-high-school professional training. ECE II requires an associate degree. ECE III entails a bachelor's or entry level master's degree (with advanced practice designations to be implemented over time). Further, the Task Force put forth a vision that is audacious but also acknowledges current realities in the field: eventually, all lead educators must have a bachelor's degree, although, given current realities, educators with an associate degree, the ECE II, will be eligible to hold lead-educator responsibilities for working with children birth through preschool, with guidance from ECE IIIs and with important support from educators who have earned ECE I certification.

FORMAR CONEXIONES

Para alcanzar la equidad auténtica, se requiere una trasformación radical en la educación superior

Rhian Evans Allvin | *Directora Ejecutiva*

En los casi tres años que han pasado desde el lanzamiento de Revalorizar la Profesión (P2P, siglas en inglés), el tema de los debates más agitados ha sido la cuestión de si se debe requerir que todo educador de niños pequeños obtenga un título universitario de cuatro años. En el sistema conceptual unificador del Comité de P2P (P2P Task Force), la recomendación es que la profesión tenga tres niveles: Educador de la Primera Infancia (ECE, siglas en inglés) I, II y III. Aunque los tres niveles requieren una preparación especializada en la primera infancia, se distinguen en la cantidad de capacitación y en las resultantes funciones y responsabilidades profesionales. ECE I consta de 120 horas de capacitación profesional después de la educación secundaria. ECE II requiere un título asociado (de 2 años). ECE III implica un título de 4 años o los estudios principiantes para la maestría (con designaciones de práctica avanzada que se implementarán con el tiempo). Además, el Comité propuso una visión audaz que también reconoce las realidades actuales del campo: al final, todos los educadores principales deberán tener el título de 4 años, aunque en vista de la situación actual, los que tienen un título de 2 años,

This vision is grounded in the substantial evidence laid out in the 2015 National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8*. The authors persuasively argued that in order to fully realize the opportunities for young children, an early childhood educator must be deeply grounded in the science of early learning. Ideally, postsecondary general education (e.g., math, science, sociology, psychology) along with early childhood coursework (theory and analysis) and robust practice experience can equip an early childhood educator to be successful in any setting birth through age 8.

To move from the current reality to the audacious vision will require massive system changes. Full financing of the cost of *high-quality* early education and care, which includes compensation and benefits for early childhood educators in keeping with the importance of their work, is at the top of the list. So, too, is a radical transformation of the system of higher education tasked with preparing early childhood educators.

To fully realize opportunities for young children, educators must be grounded in the science of early learning.

There are nearly two million individuals, mostly women, in the portion of the early childhood education workforce that serves children from birth through age 5. Roughly half of them are employed in center-based care, and half work in family child care. Just over half have a postsecondary degree (associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctorate). But the efforts that these educators have made to enhance their knowledge and skills are not being appropriately rewarded. Compared with adults (over 25) in the civilian workforce who have bachelor's degrees, teachers of infants through prekindergartners with a bachelor's degree earn between $13,000 and $29,000 less than women, and $45,000 to $61,000 less than men, on average. This makes teaching

el ECE II, serán elegibles para llevar a cabo las responsabilidades de un educador principal al trabajar con niños entre el nacimiento y el nivel preescolar, con la guía de educadores con el certificado ECE III y con el apoyo importante de educadores que han ganado la certificación ECE I.

Esta visión se fundamenta en la evidencia considerable que se expone en el informe de National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine de 2015, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8* (Transformación de la fuerza laboral para niños entre el nacimiento y los 8 años de edad). Los autores sostienen elocuentemente que a fin de que se realicen plenamente las oportunidades para los niños pequeños, el educador de la primera infancia debe de contar con un cimiento fuerte en la ciencia del aprendizaje infantil. Idealmente, la educación general post-secundaria (por ej., matemáticas, ciencias, sociología, psicología) junto con cursos en la primera infancia (teoría y análisis), además de una experiencia práctica robusta, pueden equipar a un educador de niños pequeños para trabajar exitosamente en cualquier programa para niños entre el nacimiento y los 8 años.

Para progresar desde la realidad actual hasta esta visión audaz, se requerirán cambios trascendentales en el sistema. El financiamiento pleno del costo del cuidado y educación infantil *de alta calidad,* que incluye una compensación y prestaciones para educadores de la infancia que correspondan con la importancia de su labor, es de la mayor prioridad. También lo es una transformación radical del sistema de educación superior que se dedique a la preparación de educadores de niños pequeños.

Casi 2 millones de personas, mayormente mujeres, componen la porción de la fuerza laboral de la primera infancia que sirve a niños entre el nacimiento y los 5 años. Aproximadamente la mitad de ellas trabajan para centros de cuidado, y la mitad trabajan en hogares de cuidado en familia. Un poco más que la mitad de ellas tiene un título post-secundario (de 2 o 4 años, maestría o doctorado). Pero no se está compensando apropiadamente los esfuerzos que estos educadores han realizado a fin de mejorar sus conocimientos y habilidades. En comparación con los adultos mayores a 25 años en la fuerza laboral

in early childhood among the lowest paid occupations with a bachelor's degree in the United States. It also acts as a disincentive for individuals to seek a degree and for institutions of higher education to create and maintain early childhood degree programs.

Despite these dismal statistics, there are important financial benefits to earning a bachelor's degree. Preschool and prekindergarten educators with a bachelor's degree earn an average of $5 to $8 more an hour than their counterparts with high school diplomas. Over the course of their careers, that adds up to about $500,000. And, according to the Department of Labor, the average unemployment rate for those with a bachelor's degree is 2 percent lower than the unemployment rate for those with a high school diploma. Bachelor's degrees also expand employment opportunities as public and private employers are in desperate need of bachelor-degreed educators. (Want to learn more about the ECE workforce? Check out *The Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018*, which is available at https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2018-index/. Unless otherwise noted, the statistics above are from this index.)

Higher education: Time for a radical remodel

The current situation for the workforce and the obvious benefits of a degree together present a compelling case for renovating postsecondary early childhood professional preparation programs. This requires two agendas that must be tackled simultaneously.

The first is inside-the-profession work led by early childhood faculty and supported by higher education administration to embed the revised "Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators" (available at NAEYC.org/resources/position-statements/standards-professional-preparation) in every aspect of postsecondary professional

civil que tienen títulos de 4 años, los maestros de niños entre el nacimiento y el nivel pre-kindergarten que tienen el mismo título ganen en promedio entre $13,000 y $29,000 menos que las mujeres, y entre $45,000 y $61,000 menos que los hombres. De ahí que el puesto de maestro de la primera infancia se halla entre los oficios con título universitario de 4 años con los salarios más bajos en los Estados Unidos. También desanima que los individuos busquen un título y desincentiva que los institutos de educación superior creen y mantengan programas de títulos especializados en la primera infancia.

A pesar de estas estadísticas tan sombrías, los títulos de 4 años ofrecen ventajas económicas importantes. Los educadores de preescolar y pre-kindergarten con estos títulos ganan en promedio entre $5 y $8 más por hora que sus homólogos con el diploma de la escuela secundaria. Durante el transcurso de sus carreras profesionales, esto se suma a como $500,000 dólares más. Además, según el Departamento de Labor, la tasa promedia de desempleo de personas con título de 4 años es menor en un 2% que la tasa de desempleo de los que tienen el diploma de la secundaria. Los títulos de 4 años también expanden las oportunidades de empleo, ya que los empleadores públicos y privados necesitan desesperadamente de educadores con tales títulos. (¿Quiere aprender más sobre la fuerza laboral de la primera infancia? Vea *The Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018* (Índice de la fuerza laboral de la primera infancia de 2018), disponible en ingles en https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2018-index/. A menos que se indique lo contrario, las estadísticas de más arriba son de este informe).

La educación superior. Ha llegado la hora de una transformación radical

La situación actual de la fuerza laboral y las ventajas manifiestas de tener un título presentan juntas un argumento convincente a favor de la renovación de los programas postsecundarios de preparación profesional en la primera infancia. Esto requiere la formación de dos planes de acción, los cuales deben de emprenderse simultáneamente.

El primer plan es del trabajo que ha de realizarse dentro de la profesión con el liderazgo de profesores de la primera infancia y el apoyo de los administradores de la educación superior, con el

preparation programs, such as course content, candidate assessments, and field experiences. This process includes sifting through the implications of the leveling associated with the standards and what this means for early childhood content included in associate and bachelor's degrees.

The second is a leadership agenda that involves higher education leadership, philanthropic partners, and federal and state governments. Infrastructure needs to be in place in order for professional preparation programs to meet their responsibility for graduating effective early childhood educators. Institutions of higher education grapple with the three-legged stool—access (including student-focused supports), affordability, and quality. Attaching each of the three legs simultaneously has proven near impossible and has a disproportionate impact on students of color. For example, White students enroll in colleges and universities at higher rates than their Black and Hispanic counterparts—and at dramatically higher rates in elite four-year degree programs—and they are significantly more likely to finish a degree program in six years or less. Meanwhile, Black students take on student loan debt more frequently, and Black and Hispanic students are more likely to attend less selective schools, where per-student spending is much lower. (For more information, see the useful infographic at https://hechingerreport.org/facts-about-race-and-college-admission/.) These data are supported by the findings in NAEYC's 2015 market survey of the field, in which non-White early childhood educators reported lack of financial aid and lack of mentors as significant barriers to higher education and employment.

Institutions of higher education grapple with access, affordability, and quality.

fin de entretejer las "Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators" (Normas y aptitudes profesionales para educadores de la primera infancia) revisadas (y disponibles en NAEYC.org/resources/position-statements/standards-professional-preparation) a toda faceta de los programas postsecundarios de preparación profesional, tales como el contenido de los cursos, las evaluaciones de candidatos y las experiencias prácticas. Este proceso incluye analizar las implicaciones de la nivelación asociada a las normas, y el significado de esto para el contenido de los cursos sobre la primera infancia requeridos para los títulos de 2 y de 4 años.

El segundo plan es una agenda de liderazgo que implica la participación del liderazgo de la educación superior, socios filantrópicos y los gobiernos estatales y federal. Es necesario contar con una infraestructura para que los programas de preparación profesional cumplan con su responsabilidad de lograr la graduación de educadores eficaces de niños pequeños. Los institutos de educación superior hacen frente al desafío de proporcionar tres componentes necesarios a la vez: el acceso (con apoyos focalizados en los estudiantes), los precios asequibles y la calidad. El logro simultáneo de cada una de estas tres metas ha resultado casi imposible y ha tenido un impacto desproporcionado en los estudiantes de color. Por ejemplo, los estudiantes blancos se matriculan en universidades a tasas mayores que sus homólogos negros e hispanos—y en tasas dramáticamente mayores con respecto a

Standing between what is and a fully realized vision for the profession is a radical higher education agenda that will require the leadership of deans, provosts, presidents, regents, politicians, and philanthropists to leverage their power, influence, and charitable dollars to affix the three legs of the stool at the same time.

To be sure, with more than 3,000 early childhood degree programs, the phenomenal T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood initiative, and QRIS systems that meaningfully support early childhood educators in advancing their postsecondary credentials, there are promising practices throughout the country. *These promising practices must be moved to scale to create a floor of access, affordability, and quality, including*

Access:

- Full articulation and transfer agreements between associate and bachelor's degree programs
- Credit for prior learning grounded in evidence of knowledge, skills, and competencies
- Associate and bachelor's degree programs within an aligned system and, whenever possible, located on a shared campus

programas élites para títulos de 4 años—y tienen una probabilidad significativamente mayor de terminar un programa de especialización en 6 años o menos. En cambio, los estudiantes negros toman préstamos estudiantiles con más frecuencia, y los estudiantes negros e hispanos tienen más probabilidad de asistir a escuelas menos selectivas, donde los gastos por estudiante son mucho menores. (Para más información, vea la infografía útil en https://hechingerreport.org/facts-about-race-and-college-admission/). Estos datos se apoyan con los hallazgos de la encuesta del ámbito que realizó NAEYC en 2015, en que los educadores de la primera infancia no blancos informaron de la falta de ayuda financiera y de mentores como barreras significantes a la educación superior y al empleo.

Entre lo que es actualmente y una visión plenamente realizada para la profesión, queda una agenda radical de educación superior que requerirá el liderazgo de decanos, rectores, presidentes, directores, políticos y filántropos con el fin de aprovechar su poder, influencia y fondos caritativos para activar los tres componentes del sistema a la vez.

Claro está, con más de 3,000 programas que ofrecen títulos en la primera infancia, la iniciativa fenomenal T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood y sistemas de tasación y mejoramiento de calidad (QRIS, siglas en inglés) que brinden un apoyo significativo a los educadores de niños pequeños en su progreso para obtener credenciales postsecundarias, existen prácticas prometedoras en todas partes del país. *Estas prácticas prometedoras deberán moverse a escala a fin de crear un nivel mínimo de acceso, precios asequibles y calidad, inclusive lo siguiente:*

Acceso:

- Acuerdos de plena articulación y transferencia entre programas para títulos de 2 y de 4 años
- Crédito para el aprendizaje anterior, cimentado en evidencia de conocimientos, habilidades y aptitudes
- Programas para títulos de 2 y de 4 años dentro de un sistema alineado y, donde sea posible, ubicados en un solo sitio
- La incorporación del acceso pleno a mentores y consejeros universitarios durante todo el programa de estudios

- Embedded college mentors and coaches fully accessible throughout a degree program
- High school vocational and technical education programs leading to a recognized credential, like the Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)
- CDA and other first-step training programs fully aligned to college credit
- Resources to provide targeted supports for students, with particular attention to multilingual learners, students requiring developmental education, and students who are the first in their families to attend college
- Course offerings during hours and in locations that are accessible to working students
- Cohort models that provide shared learning and experiences

Affordability:

- Employer-sponsored tuition assistance
- State-based tuition support

- Programas de instrucción vocacional y técnica durante la escuela secundaria que lleven a una credencial reconocida, como Child Development Associate Credential (CDA, o Credencial Asociada en Desarrollo Infantil)
- Programas de capacitación para la CDA y otras de primer nivel que estén plenamente alineadas a los estudios universitarios
- Recursos destinados a la provisión de apoyos específicos para estudiantes, con atención especial a los multilingües, los que requieren instrucción remedial y los que son los primeros en sus familias en asistir a la universidad
- Cursos ofrecidos a horas y en sitios de acceso fácil para estudiantes empleados
- Modelos de grupos de estudiantes que les provean la instrucción y el aprendizaje compartidos

Asequibilidad:

- Asistencia con los costos de matrícula provista por los empleadores
- Asistencia con los costos de matrícula provista por el estado

- Private philanthropy and federal grant and loan programs aligned to ECE degrees
- State and locally based tuition guarantee and college promise programs
- Employer release time and a well-paid, consistent pool of substitute teachers

Quality:

- Lab schools on college campuses, as well as access to high-quality field settings in local communities
- Full-time, high-quality early childhood education faculty, comprising and reflecting the diversity of the early childhood workforce and children birth through age 8
- Required higher education accreditation by the profession, with a mandate for full alignment to the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators
- Practicum experience in programs serving the full diversity of the birth to 8 population

From the inception of P2P, all Task Force organizations have been unified in the belief that we should not do anything that will undermine the current diversity of the workforce. If we whiten the field, we have failed. The systemic and institutional barriers that have been perpetuated for centuries are preventing many early childhood educators from having equitable access to bachelor's degrees. We call on our partners in leadership in higher education, government, and philanthropy to join with the field to eliminate those barriers together.

All Task Force organizations have been unified in the belief that we should not undermine the current diversity of the workforce.

- Programas de filantropía privada y programas de préstamos y concesiones federales que estén alineados a títulos en la primera infancia
- Programas estatales y locales de garantía de los costos de matrícula, y programas de becas de hasta el 100% del costo de matrícula
- Tiempo de baja del trabajo y un conjunto estable y bien remunerado de maestros sustitutos

Calidad:

- Escuelas laboratorio ubicadas en los campus universitarios, además de acceso a experiencias prácticas de alta calidad en comunidades locales
- Profesores de tiempo completo y altamente calificados de educación de la primera infancia, que componen y reflejan la diversidad de la fuerza laboral de educación infantil y de los niños entre el nacimiento y los 8 años
- Acreditación de educación superior requerida por la profesión, con autoridad para el alineamiento pleno con las Normas y aptitudes profesionales para educadores de la primera infancia
- Experiencias prácticas en programas que sirven a toda la población diversa de niños entre el nacimiento y los 8 años de edad

Desde el inicio de P2P, todas las entidades del Comité están unidas en la creencia que no debemos hacer hada que reduzca la diversidad actual de la fuerza laboral. Si blanqueamos el campo, habremos fracasado. Durante siglos se han perpetuado barreras sistemáticas e institucionales que les impiden a muchos educadores de niños pequeños el acceso equitativo a títulos universitarios. Pedimos a nuestros socios en el liderazgo de la educación superior, el gobierno y la filantropía que se unan a nosotros en el ámbito profesional para que juntos eliminemos dichas barreras.

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NAEYC **Member Spotlight**

Jared Hennen

Early Childhood Specialist
Chicago, Illinois

Jared Hennen didn't begin his teaching career working with young children, but he soon discovered that early childhood education can be an excellent vehicle for positive change. After budget cuts eliminated his middle school Spanish program, he transitioned to teaching kindergarten. He had much to learn, but he saw that his linguistic skills gave him a strong foundation for teaching kindergartners reading and writing.

From the beginning of the school year, he was struck by the differences in the kindergartners' knowledge and skills—and by the difficulty of helping those who did not go to pre-K catch up. Finding that there were not enough local pre-K programs to meet demand, Jared set out to create the first preschool program in his school community. Jared spoke with his school's principal and other leaders in the district and worked with organizations—including NAEYC—to understand the many different regulations the preschool would have to follow. He also observed pre-K teachers and researched theories on child development to create the program's curriculum. "It didn't come without its bumps, but we persevered because we knew how important it was."

Jared had three main goals for the new program. First, he wanted children to learn through play. "High-quality interaction between staff members and children can set up the foundation for teaching students how to learn and sets an example for the rest of the school of what early childhood should look like. It shouldn't look like second grade."

His second goal was to have inclusive classrooms. "Students of various abilities can all learn from each other."

The third goal was to intentionally use snack and meal times to foster community. "Nothing brings people together better than food. There's . . . bonding that you don't get from any other type of activity."

Creating a program and writing its curriculum are daunting, but through his transition from middle school to kindergarten to pre-K, Jared identifies two constants that apply when teaching any age group: being a caring teacher and setting clear expectations for students. For the former, Jared is adamant that children need to see that "regardless of where [they] come from, they matter and they belong in [the classroom]." And for the latter, Jared believes setting clear expectations goes hand in hand with creating a community. "You're not the commander of the classroom—you're the facilitator of learning, and it's something you need to do *with* [the children] rather than *for* them."

Now working as an early childhood specialist in Chicago, Jared trains teachers on reading and pre-reading strategies; he also provides instructional supports and resources for teachers of young children. This school year, he is focusing on new pre-K teachers and elementary school principals. "Being new in preschool education can feel isolating, as so many other teaching professionals don't have an understanding of the preschool classroom," Jared says. "It's hard to grow and improve as an early childhood teacher when there's no one to turn to for support."

Providing support to others has been the heart of Jared's career, as a teacher and as a professional development provider. "I found the area that mattered to me the most: a place where I could create positive change. It drove me to be more passionate about education than I ever would have been had I stayed in middle school foreign language."

NAEYC.org/get-involved/membership/spotlight

SHARE YOUR STORY Answer a few questions to tell us about your work with young children and what NAEYC membership means to you.

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Help Lead NAEYC!

The NAEYC Affiliate Advisory Council is seeking passionate members to advise the NAEYC Governing Board and national staff on all issues related to Affiliates and members and to help identify and develop strong, inclusive leadership. Members from diverse backgrounds and with leadership experiences in Affiliates, in NAEYC Interest Forums, and throughout NAEYC are encouraged to apply. Learn more by visiting **NAEYC.org/affiliate-advisory-council**.

The Council will appoint three new members through the 2020 application process, which will be open from January 6 to February 3.

To serve on the Council, applicants must have

- Current NAEYC membership
- A solid understanding of the NAEYC Affiliate structure
- The ability to participate in monthly virtual meetings, ad hoc work groups, and up to three in-person meetings each year
- A demonstrated commitment to NAEYC's Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education position statement and NAEYC's statement of commitment as a high-performing, inclusive organization

Read more about the Council and its members and accomplishments in the Affiliate Advisory Council's 2018 annual report by visiting **NAEYC.org/affiliate-advisory-council**.

We need you—your experience and expertise as an NAEYC member and leader in the early childhood field—in our organization. We invite you to come to the table and make your voice heard! Applications are available at **NAEYC.org/get-involved/leadership**.

Contact the Council at affiliateadvisorycouncil@naeyc.org.

Current Council members shared why they applied:

I applied in an effort to bring forward the K–3 voice. As a kindergarten teacher, I saw how the PK–K transition was critical, yet knew how some teachers of Grades 1–3 did not see themselves as early childhood educators. **—Brian Kingrey, Iowa**

I was seeking opportunities as a Latino woman from the Spanish-speaking community to share my perspectives and to seek how I can contribute to advance equity and social justice issues in the early childhood profession and related services in NAEYC. **—Margarita Marichal, Puerto Rico**

I'm very proud of the Council's engagement with issues of equity and diversity. We've worked together to bring often marginalized voices to the center, and we are excited to watch our Affiliates do the same. **—Chris Amirault, Oklahoma**

It is important for me to be of service. I see the need to advance the awareness, appreciation, and inclusion of all members of our NAEYC community and to expand the participation of all in our early childhood field. The Council is one way to do just that. **—Cary Larson-McKay, California**

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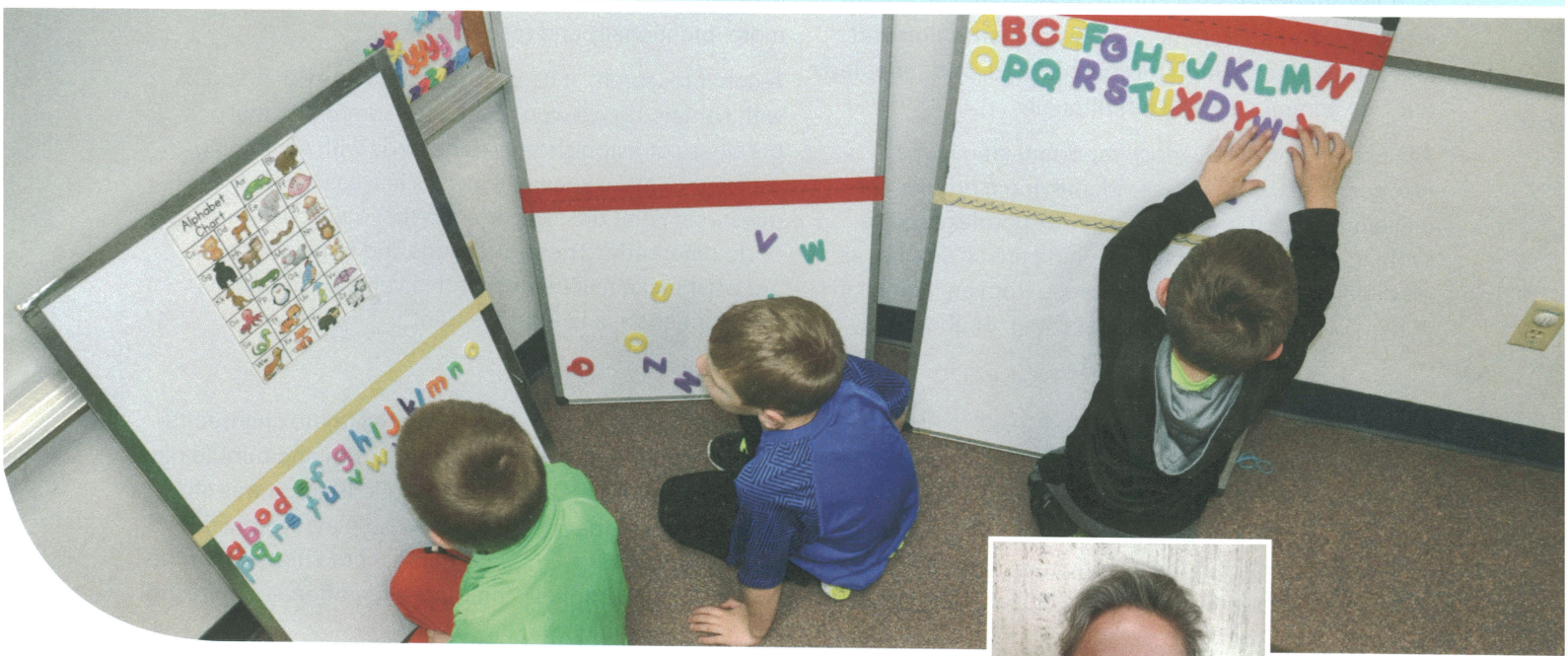
Learning Targets

Helping Kindergartners Focus on Letter Names and Sounds

Heidi Heath DeStefano



As a reading intervention teacher in an elementary school, one of my responsibilities is to help students fill in their learning gaps. Struggling readers often come to me with negative attitudes toward reading, so I need to present learning activities in creative ways in order to capture their interest.

One teaching assignment I had was to help a group of 11 very active kindergartners learn letter names and a subset of letter sounds. After several weeks of engaging the children in a variety of letter-acquisition activities—most of which I drew from my school district's literacy programs—the assessment information revealed that my instruction was not making a significant impact on student learning. More alarming, I noticed the children were not motivated to learn the letters or to answer accurately when I assessed them. For example, they were using the magnetic letters as toys, and I was spending more time on behavior management

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Thoughts on the Article | Andrew J. Stremmel, *Voices* Executive Editor

In the following article, reading intervention teacher Heidi Heath DeStefano reflects on her struggles to help children learn letter names and sounds. She then sets out to conduct research to determine if establishing learning targets motivates and focuses the children in learning letters and sounds of the alphabet. Like all teachers who seek to be effective, she wants to help children learn, be engaged, and take ownership of their learning. Her study is guided by a theory of action, a comprehensive review of the literature, and a strategic process of instruction and assessment that is monitored, recorded, and reflected upon systematically and intentionally.

The first and arguably most important step in the teacher research process is identifying a *problem of meaning* (something that puzzles or perplexes). The problems and dilemmas of teaching are all around: as Heidi demonstrates, problems arise from an interest in finding out more about one's teaching, or about how children learn or attempt to understand; while trying to develop some new teaching method; or when faced with needing to make a decision and act upon it. Heidi's research represents a distinctive way of knowing about teaching and learning that alters not only her teaching practice and understanding of children's learning (in this case an ability to internalize learning goals) but also her notion of what it means to be a learner in her own classroom. Here, she reflects deeply on the value of learning goals and gains insights into the need to teach more intentionally and responsively.

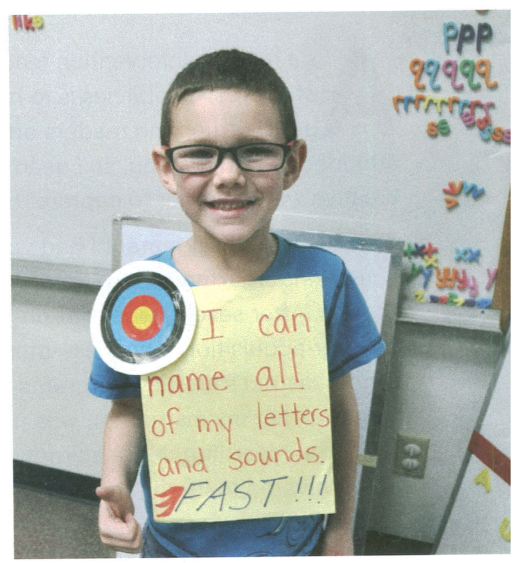
Teacher research, at its best, is a good story that begins with something we wonder about—something that perplexes or astonishes us—and ends with something we want to make known. It always leaves us with the questions What did I learn? and What can I change or do differently? These questions and conclusions are what make teacher research a vehicle for change, transformation, and improvement.

than on teaching. I found that activities like sorting letters and tracing letters in sand helped keep students from rough and tumble play, but these activities were not bringing them any closer to the instructional objective.

I realized I had not effectively conveyed the purpose of our intervention sessions. Consequently, I needed to find a way to focus their efforts and encourage them to take ownership of their learning.

In professional development sessions, my school district had begun training teachers on providing students with clear statements of intended learning outcomes when we introduced new units or activities. These outcomes provide a shared direction: different students may take different paths (building on their unique prior experiences), but they all end up mastering the same essential knowledge and skills. I challenged myself to adapt the idea of a learning outcome in a format these kindergartners would relate to. I decided to attach the statement, "I CAN NAME ALL OF MY LETTERS AND SOUNDS," to a colorful 10-ring target and refer to it as a *learning target*.

In the past, I had goals for my lessons, but I had never tried anything this explicit to engage the kindergartners in thinking about the goals. Since this was a new strategy for me, I approached the work as both a teacher and a researcher. I mapped out a study to determine if the learning target would motivate the children to shift from rough and tumble play to focused learning. I was still going to use playful activities and games, but I hoped that the children's attention and thinking



would shift if I could guide them more clearly on the purpose of our sessions.

Literature review

Prompted by education researcher Robert J. Marzano (2003), who explains that when students can identify what they're learning, they significantly outscore students who cannot, my research on using learning outcomes began with two sources: *Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today's Lesson* (Moss & Brookhart 2012) and *Visible Learning for Literacy: Implementing the Practices That Work Best to Accelerate Student Learning* (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie 2016).

The learning target theory of action in *Learning Targets* involves using clear, student-friendly descriptions of what students will learn, then incorporating a cycle of instruction, monitoring, and assessing until they reach their goals (Moss & Brookhart 2012). Learners are actively engaged with the teacher in this cycle. As an experienced teacher, the reasoning behind setting targets resonated with me: "no matter what we decide students need to learn, not much will happen until students understand what they are supposed to learn during a lesson and set their sights on learning it" (Moss, Brookhart, & Long 2011, 1).

Visible Learning for Literacy (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie 2016) offers similar advice, suggesting that teachers need to set learning intentions and provide success criteria. After a comprehensive review of the literature, the authors found that instructional strategies that incorporate key aspects of learning intentions—such as teacher clarity, formative assessment, and prompt feedback—are among the top 10 most effective ways to increase student achievement. Much like the cycle described in the learning target theory of action, the keys with learning intentions are clarity in goals, monitoring progress (i.e., formative assessment, which may be teacher-made quizzes or other means of determining students' recent learning), and feedback that is timely enough to guide the teacher and learners. This feedback loop allows teachers to use information from formative assessments to adjust instruction and reteach material so students meet their learning objectives before their final evaluations. (Or, in the case of my kindergartners, before they became frustrated and started to worry that they wouldn't be able to learn to read.) Focusing on how feedback supports learners' self-efficacy, the authors discuss "three internal questions that drive learners":

- Where am I going? What are my goals?
- How am I going there? What progress is being made toward the goal?
- Where to next? What activities need to be undertaken next to make better progress? (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie 2016, 101)

Voices of Practitioners: Teacher Research in Early Childhood Education is NAEYC's online journal devoted to teacher research. Visit **NAEYC.org/resources/pubs/vop** to

- Peruse an archive of *Voices* articles
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- Read another *Voices* article by Heidi Heath DeStefano

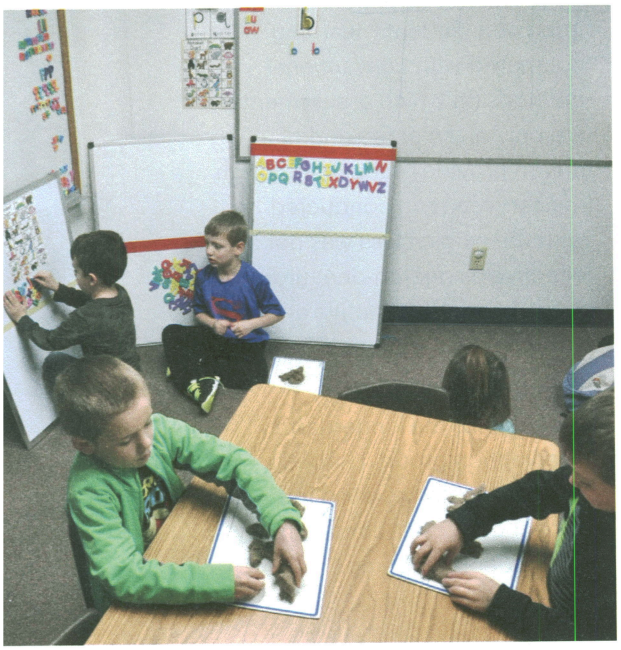
These ideas about clear goals and actionable feedback are not new. Four decades ago, Benjamin Bloom found a similar instructional cycle to be quite effective. While searching for methods of group instruction as effective as one-on-one tutoring, he showed that *mastery learning* (an approach that combines typical large-group instruction with frequent assessments, timely feedback, and customized supports) significantly improved students' learning compared with *conventional methods* (in which assessments are only given at the end of a unit to provide grades). Although mastery learning conducted with the whole class was not as effective as one-on-one tutoring, it was nearly as effective and far more efficient (Bloom 1984).

Adapting this body of research for the kindergarten intervention group, I hoped to dramatically increase the impact of my instruction on the students' learning.

Studying the effect of learning targets with kindergartners

The existing literature convinced me that learning targets are important, but much of the research has been done with older children. I was interested in answering the following questions:

- Would the kindergartners in my reading intervention class understand the concept of a learning target?
- Would using the learning target help motivate the students to take ownership of their learning and aid them in acquiring the letters and sounds of the alphabet?
- If using a learning target were successful for the students' alphabet learning, could it be used for other concepts?



Setting and participants

The elementary school where I conducted this action research study is located in a small, predominantly white and middle-class community in Wyoming. In recent years, we have enrolled one or two Hispanic children who speak Spanish and English in each classroom, but who often need English vocabulary development (DeStefano 2017). The demographics of our school

> The children became more enthusiastic as they took ownership of their learning.

are gradually changing: the school has long served children whose parents are well-educated professionals and is now serving a larger proportion of children from working-class families.

The learning environment for this study was my small intervention room, containing a table, magnetic whiteboards propped around the room, and a few storage closets on which I often post word lists.

My teaching schedule included three kindergarten reading intervention groups with three to five students in each group, for a total of 11 students (four girls and seven boys). Two of the children spoke Spanish and English (neither qualified for dual language learner services); the remaining nine children only spoke English. All 11 children were identified by their regular classroom teachers as needing extra instruction to master letter names and sounds.

My study of the learning target approach (which I explain in detail in the following sections) spanned nine weeks. I met with each of the small groups for 15 to 20 minutes a day, four to five days per week.

Data collection

Throughout the study, I collected three types of data:

1. A letter-naming assessment that consisted of a random assortment of all uppercase and lowercase letters, plus typewritten g and a. This resulted in 54 letters that the children had to be able to name to meet this part of the target.
2. A sound identification assessment that consisted of a random assortment of all uppercase and lowercase letters, plus typewritten *g* and *a*, resulting in 54 letters for which the children had to provide sounds. I was teaching and assessing one sound for each consonant (e.g., /k/ for C and c) and the short vowel sounds; therefore, the children needed to learn just one sound for each letter during this intervention.
3. My observations of the students' reactions to the intervention.

I met with each group of children and showed them the colorful 10-ring target posted on the wall of our room. We discussed that the purpose of a target is to help us

practice getting a bull's-eye. Then we discussed that the bull's-eye in our classroom was to name all of the letters and their main sounds. (I also briefly explained that they would learn more sounds in first grade and that in kindergarten, we were learning the most important sounds that each letter makes.) I modeled what meeting the target looks like, pointing to each letter in a randomly sorted list and quickly saying the name and associated sound. I told the students that the purpose in this learning space was to aim for our target: "I CAN NAME ALL OF MY LETTERS AND SOUNDS." At the beginning and end of each session, we reviewed this target by saying it aloud as I pointed to the words.

After my initial explanation of the learning target, I assessed each child on the letter names and sounds to determine which ones each child already knew. On the average, students named 41.5 out of 54 letter names and 32 out of 54 letter sounds.

Next, I met with each student individually and we discussed which letter names and sounds they needed to acquire in order to reach the learning target. I created customized little booklets containing the letters to be learned by each child and discussed the specific activities that would help them learn those letters.

Every week, I administered the same assessments to each available student individually and discussed his or her progress. During this feedback discussion, I prompted the children to think about the questions that drive learners, from "Where am I going?" to "What activities need to be undertaken next to make better progress?" (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie 2016, 101). (While I met with children individually, the others in the group engaged in the learning activities I provided, focusing their efforts on the letters they personally needed to acquire.) To help motivate the children, I was sure to find some progress in each assessment. After the assessments, we celebrated as a group. As I stated what a child had accomplished that week, the child got to throw a small pillow at our target. When a student correctly provided a letter's sound and name, there was an added celebration: we dramatically ripped that page out of the booklet.

As a standard teaching procedure, I took notice of the students' comments and observable behaviors. I recorded my observations on a daily basis as short, anecdotal notes. I maintained a record for each child so that I could efficiently track progress. Using my observations and weekly assessments, I created the little booklets that contained the specific letters each child needed to learn and planned the activities that would help them learn those letters. My notes also helped me be more specific with my feedback, and I could more easily relate the children's efforts to their success.

Findings

Within the first week of implementation, it appeared that the learning target would be highly effective. I felt rising elation as I saw the children becoming more enthusiastic and motivated as they took ownership of their learning. Assessment scores also steadily improved.

One child immediately understood his purpose for being with me and met his goal early on in the intervention. Discussing his strengths and needs with his teacher, we agreed that he was overall doing well in learning to read and therefore not in need of additional interventions. I had him return to his classroom, victorious. Another boy noticed and asked, "Hey! Where is *he* going?" In response, I asked, "Why are we all working so hard in my room?" He repeated what we had been saying every day when we entered the class: "We are here because we need to learn to name all of our letters and sounds." I told him, "He hit the bull's-eye, so he is going back to his classroom to work on other things." After thinking for a moment, he set his mouth in a firm line and went to work on his activity with obvious resolve. It took a while, but all of the children finally understood that everyone in our school is required to know their letters and sounds—"even the *principal*," as we often said while making the connection to learning to read and write (Duke & Mesmer 2018).

Finding 1: Every child acquired knowledge of the letter names and sounds

Based on the weekly assessment scores, by the end of my nine-week study, every child could name all the letters (uppercase and lowercase, plus typewritten *g* and *a*) and virtually all of the target sounds—just one student lacked one letter sound. For both letter names and sounds, the kindergartners' knowledge increased sharply in the first four to five weeks and most of the children had reached the target by week six.

Finding 2: The children understood the connection between effort and outcome and were able to focus their efforts

While it may seem redundant to ask students to state the learning target before each session, to review it and their progress at the end of each session, and to individually assess the children and discuss the target every week, I found that repetition was required for the children to internalize the purpose of their presence in the intervention room. Although I was surprised by how explicit and repetitive I needed to be, I also saw it working. As understanding of their learning target deepened, the students engaged in far less unfocused play and became determined to reach their learning target. During our discussions, I repeatedly reinforced the connection between their efforts and their successes. Students were able to understand the connection between their work and their expanding knowledge of the alphabet. My observations are consistent with prior research indicating that teachers who focused on formative assessment saw an increase in students' learning, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (Brookhart, Moss, & Long 2008).

Finding 3: The children understood that using learning targets can be a lifelong strategy and were able to identify personal goals

The children found the novelty of throwing a small pillow at the target to celebrate progress highly motivating. Just as I was careful to note the specific progress that each child made, I also explicitly tied this sought-after event to the cause and effect relationship of goal-setting, practice, feedback, and success.

Once this understanding was solid, we discussed that anyone, at any age, can have a learning target. I told them about my personal learning target of speaking another language fluently, and I shared a few of the activities I was doing to reach it. Each student identified a personal learning target and we brainstormed ways they could work toward them. For example, one child wanted to learn how to make his own sack lunch and another wanted to ride a bike without training wheels.

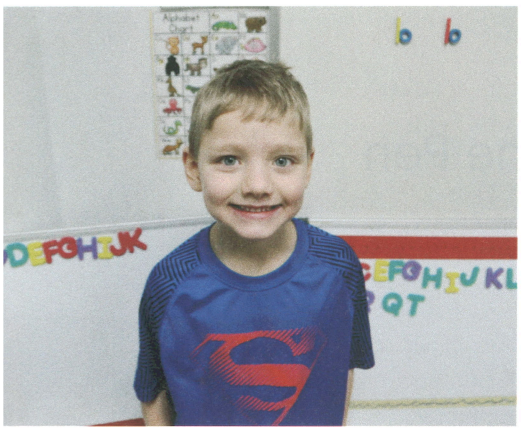
After students obtained their alphabet learning target (which virtually all of the children did by week six), I introduced a new target for reading: "I CAN MAKE WHAT I SAY MATCH WHAT I SEE." This new target would help students focus on each letter so they could accurately decode the text in their books. The concept of a learning target was easier for students to understand with the second target, and once again it seemed to enhance their learning.

When the school principal asked me if I had any celebrations that could be presented at the monthly school board meeting, I could barely contain my enthusiasm! The students and their families stood in front of the school board a month later, and we proudly presented their achievements along with their personal learning targets. Before the learning target intervention, I would have been worried about bringing my rambunctious kindergartners to a school board meeting, but the pride they felt for their achievements was strong, and they conducted themselves with dignity.

Finding 4: Learning targets benefitted families, older students, and myself

Using learning targets to help motivate and focus the children was well received by families from the beginning. Throughout, seeing their children's excitement and growing confidence as they worked toward and reached a goal was positive for the whole family.

Because of this success, I also began using learning targets with my older students, and it worked well with all of my reading intervention groups. I believe the targets helped me as much as the children because creating the learning targets aided in focusing my instruction. I gave myself the



professional learning target of providing a learning target for each new concept to be taught!

Implications

A great deal of evidence indicates that different approaches are needed for different students and situations and that teachers must adjust instruction to meet the needs of their students (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie 2016). When first working with these energetic kindergartners, I began to think they might not be developmentally ready to learn letter names and sounds. It was an eye-opening teaching experience to witness how, given a clear and motivating learning target, unfocused children became strategic learners in a positive and fun way. In addition, I am hopeful that establishing the process of setting a goal, working strategically toward that goal, and celebrating success at the beginning of students' academic careers will set them up to repeat this pattern of success in the future. After all, research shows that *self-efficacy* as a learner ("the confidence or strength of belief that we have in ourselves that we can make our learning happen") has a big impact on achievement (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie 2016, 24).

The increases I observed in my kindergartners' self-regulation and self-efficacy have been reported in other studies (Brookhart, Moss, & Long 2008; Moss, Brookhart, & Long 2011). I've also learned I'm not the first teacher to use colorful 10-ring targets to represent learning objectives (Moss, Brookhart, & Long 2011). In my experience, goal-setting is a concept most teachers are familiar with, but in the struggle to focus my active kindergarten students, I had forgotten how powerful it can be. In light of this study, I now have effective methods for helping young children internalize learning goals.

This experience prompted me to do some deep reflecting on my teaching practice. I had been presenting activities without conveying strong learning goals. Had the students' initial lack of focus mirrored my own? Had my teaching become a bit automatic over the years? Revisiting the effectiveness of learning goals and experiencing again how powerful they can be for children was an important learning touchstone for me. This, along with furthering my understanding of learning targets by studying research on the topic, helped return me to teaching intentionally and with greater responsiveness to children's needs.

One unexpected result of this study is that I learned to be more culturally sensitive. During an activity in which students were using magnetic letters to match initial sounds to picture cards, a Hispanic student had placed the letter *d* in front of a picture of money. She stood, frustrated, staring at the remaining picture of a dog and then at the letter *m* in her hand. I asked her, "What is the first sound you hear in *money*?" Her eyes widened in comprehension, then narrowed as she drew herself up and proudly said, "WE call it *dinero*!" Because she spoke English, I had been instructing her without considering her cultural lens. She was magnificent, and I was humbled.

Using colorful 10-ring targets can make learning goals more concrete for young learners. My Wyoming students—many of whom come from hunting backgrounds and all of whom are familiar with hunting—were highly motivated by this particular visual. For students with different backgrounds, other visuals may resonate more strongly. However, the learning target theory of action is a research-based tool teachers can consider when designing instruction to have greater impact on student self-regulation, self-efficacy, and learning.

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For the references, see the online version of this article that is available at **NAEYC.org/resources/pubs/vop**.

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Preschool Interactive Writing Instruction

Inviting Emergent Writers to Share the Pen

Anna H. Hall

As I embarked on my dissertation research nearly a decade ago, I knew that interactive writing—that is, an authentic, collaborative writing activity between teacher and children—held promise as a preschool writing strategy. But I wasn't sure what adaptations would be appropriate to meet 3- to 5-year-olds' developmental needs. Even though I had used an interactive writing strategy as a kindergarten teacher in whole group settings for a variety of purposes, I didn't know if or how this strategy might work with younger children. It wasn't until I practiced it daily for 13 weeks—rotating between five different preschool classrooms—that I learned how to adapt interactive writing for very young emergent writers. In this article, I share my journey as a teacher and as a researcher with the hope that more preschool teachers will engage young children in a variety of interactive writing projects.

Although young children enter their preschool classrooms eager to tell stories and communicate with the world, research suggests that in most preschool classrooms, writing instruction primarily focuses on procedural knowledge, such as handwriting and name writing, rather than on the meaning-making processes involved in writing (Hall et al. 2015).

In order to move beyond teaching preschool students to identify and form letters, it is essential to understand that writing encompasses multiple dimensions, including handwriting, spelling, and composition (Strachan, Duke, & Teale 2013). These dimensions develop alongside one another in order for young children to bridge their oral and written worlds (Schickedanz & Casbergue 2009).

The different writing dimensions fall into two categories: lower-level transcription skills, such as handwriting and spelling, and higher-level executive

skills, such as generating ideas, organizing, and revising during composing (Berninger et al. 2002). As children practice in the context of real writing experiences and become proficient in lower-level skills, they become better able to focus on higher-level skills, enabling them to more easily translate language in their minds into written text (Graham 2010).

Research suggests that young children who engage in composing during authentic writing activities (creating a grocery list, writing a letter to a classmate, retelling a story through drawings and labels) show increases in a variety of early literacy skills (National Institute for Literacy 2008). Specifically, early composition activities enhance *phonological awareness* (recognition of the sounds that make up words), *alphabet knowledge* (letter identification and letter–sound knowledge), and *print awareness* (functions, forms, and conventions of written language)—all skills that are associated with future reading and writing proficiency (Strachan, Duke, & Teale 2013).

Interactive writing is a powerful way to introduce preschool children to the meaning-making processes involved in writing.

In addition to helping build a solid early literacy foundation, early composition activities nurture children's inclination toward writing (Graves 1983). As infants near their first birthdays, they begin imitating adults and experimenting with writing tools. By age 2, many toddlers demonstrate awareness that their marks carry meaning, and they may use drawings, intentional scribbles, or letter-like forms to explore and record ideas (Rowe & Neitzel 2010; Dinehart 2015). As young children move into preschool and kindergarten, they begin to use conventional letters to form letter strings (e.g., LTRGEWS) or invented spellings (e.g., "Mi Dg" for "My Dog") to write for a variety of purposes, including to tell a story or to communicate with others. All of these critical early stages of writing development build a solid foundation for conventional writing, which typically develops in the early primary years (Strachan, Duke, & Teale 2013).

Since the late 1970s, *emergent literacy* (a term coined by literacy scholar Marie Clay in the 1960s) has been the dominant theoretical perspective on early reading and writing. Emergent literacy supports the development of writing in a social context in which children can learn about the meaning and process of writing by observing and interacting with teachers and other children—and, ideally, with family members and other caregivers.

Emergent literacy encourages teachers to make writing materials readily available and to give children time to write (Clay 1975). Research on preschool writing suggests adult modeling and guidance are also critical for helping children understand how and when to apply writing skills (Hall et al. 2014). Interactive writing is an engaging and meaningful way to offer such guidance in preschool.

The interactive writing model

My experience with interactive writing began as I implemented *The Teachers Guide to Building Blocks: A Developmentally Appropriate, Multilevel Framework for Kindergarten* (Hall & Williams 2000) in my kindergarten classroom in the early 2000s. I used this strategy during different parts of the day and throughout the year to model early literacy techniques and to build a sense of community among my students.

In kindergarten, it was easy enough to bring the whole class together for an interactive writing lesson; after a few days, each child understood the rituals and routines of the strategy. We used interactive writing to make rhyming charts, to label diagrams, to record steps for building block houses, and to retell favorite stories. In addition to writing together, this strategy helped our class bond over projects like family recipe books and our garden growth album, which became treasured resources in our reading corner.

Educators developed interactive writing at the Ohio State University as part of the early literacy framework (which was designed to provide rich literacy experiences for young children—particularly those who did not begin school with a strong foundation of vocabulary and early literacy skills). An extension of shared writing, interactive writing invites children to "share the pen" in creating a group project, such as retelling a story, developing an instruction list, or creating a class book (Craig 2006).

During an interactive writing lesson, the teacher introduces an authentic reason for writing, collaborates with the students to decide what to write, and invites

the children to assist in writing the group text. In the composition process, children reread many times what they have written, and they revise as necessary. The teacher ends each lesson with a reminder to the children about how to apply the writing actions performed during the interactive writing lesson to their independent writing (Hall 2014).

As a form of contextualized instruction, interactive writing is not scripted or delivered in a predetermined format. Children help determine purposes for writing, dictate text, and share the pen. Teachers follow their students' lead while incorporating intentional instruction in key literacy areas. Key components of an interactive writing lesson include, but are not limited to (McCarrier, Pinnell, & Fountas 2000):

1. Creating a group writing project for an authentic reason
2. Engaging children in conversation to plan an oral text
3. Sharing the pen with students to compose
4. Modeling conventional writing
5. Rereading what is written to demonstrate the reading/writing connection
6. Explaining how children can transfer learning to their independent writing

Adapting interactive writing for preschool

During the first week of my dissertation research at a Head Start center, I realized that some important adaptations needed to be made to effectively teach interactive writing in preschool. Some early struggles, such as children rolling on the floor after five or six minutes, fighting over the pen, and sitting with blank stares as we stretched words to identify the sounds, led me to make quick revisions to my instructional strategies.

Although interactive writing was initially designed for preschool through first grade, the strategy is rarely observed in preschool settings. This might be due to the belief that children are not ready to write until they have sufficient alphabet knowledge and a firm grasp of letter formation. Emergent literacy theory suggests children come to school as writers (drawing and using letter-like forms to communicate) and that meaningful learning can occur in a social context at any point during children's writing development.

I found this to be true as I brought interactive writing into several different preschool classrooms. I also found that, unlike the kindergartners I had taught before, preschoolers needed more support in terms of group size, alphabet-linking activities, time frame, and individualized guidance.

Group size

I conducted the interactive writing lessons in five different mixed-age classrooms (3- to 5-year-olds) in the same Head Start center. I felt like a busy traveler as I taught a lesson, gathered my supplies, and then moved on to the next room down the hall to teach the lesson again. The first thing I noticed when traveling between classrooms was that group size mattered.

The class where I met with nine students struggled to stay on task; the children begged for a turn with the pen, as there were fewer chances during each lesson for them to engage. The class where I met with three students lacked discussion and needed much prompting to create an oral text. I found that the classes where I met with four or five children were the most lively and engaged throughout the lesson.

My experience demonstrated that preschool students in groups of four or five remain on task longer than larger groups. The smaller group is large enough for children to build on each other's ideas and small enough for each child to have many opportunities to share the pen.

This is in keeping with previous research findings on the benefits of small groups. For example, one study reported similar findings on dialogic reading in the kindergarten setting, stating that small groups gave children many chances to participate in a safe, encouraging environment and were highly motivating due to the social interactions experienced with teachers and peers (Doyle & Bramwell 2006). Similarly, another

study found that children demonstrated better story comprehension in small group reading sessions than children who were read to during a whole group lesson (Morrow & Smith 1990). Although interactive writing can be used with the whole class, using small groups of four or five preschool-age children may maximize the learning experience.

Alphabet-linking activities

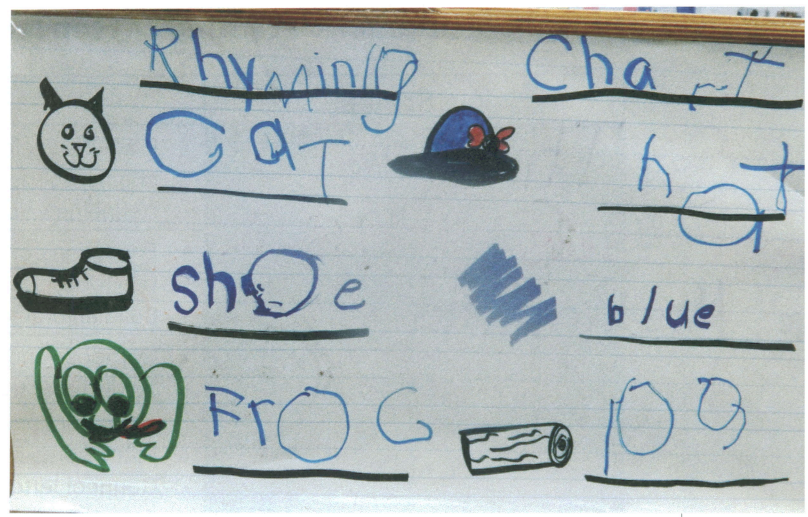
Alphabet-linking activities were not a part of my original teaching plan for preschool lessons, but I soon realized that preschoolers need a concrete method for associating letters and sounds in order to contribute fully while sharing the pen.

After giving the children individual, laminated alphabet charts and taking a minute before each lesson to chant the letters on the charts, the children quickly began to refer to their charts and call out the letters that matched the sounds in the words we were writing.

Unlike older children, most preschoolers come to school in the earliest stages of alphabet knowledge development. I found that it is critical to provide alphabet-linking activities (e.g., chanting an alphabet picture chart, chanting a class name chart) as short introductions to interactive writing lessons to help children connect letters with sounds during the composing process. Because an entire lesson is only eight to 10 minutes long, an alphabet-linking activity should take one or two minutes to complete.

If children are struggling with a letter name or sound during interactive writing, the teacher should assist after a three-second delay. This brief delay gives children a chance to respond while maintaining the quick pace of the lesson and the focus on the composition process.

The teacher should also segment words orally (as in /k/ /a/ /t/ for *cat*) throughout the lesson to help children hear isolated sounds before writing. While segmenting words, the teacher can direct children to resources like individual alphabet picture charts to help make letter–sound connections.



Finally, teachers can think aloud as they and the children write each letter of the group text. By bringing attention to the individual strokes needed to form each letter and by using everyday language to describe the letter-forming process, teachers help children gain valuable knowledge about handwriting during the authentic experience of interactive writing.

Time frame

As a teacher, you learn to recognize when your students have tuned out and it is time for a lesson to end. In preschool, children often demonstrate a loss of interest by rolling around on the floor, asking off-topic questions, or asking to do other activities.

Although typical interactive writing lessons are 10 to 15 minutes in length, I found that eight to 10 minutes was the magic length for preschool engagement. Of course, each group and each day was a little different, depending on interest in the topic and children's energy levels; but overall this was the optimal time frame for children in the study.

By focusing on the process of writing instead of on the amount of text written, teachers can capitalize on the benefits of interactive writing in this shortened time frame. The table "Preschool Interactive Writing Lesson Framework" on page 82 demonstrates how I typically allocated time during the eight to 10 minutes for interactive writing.

Preschool Interactive Writing Lesson Framework

Steps	Description
Alphabet-linking activity (1–2 minutes)	• Practice an alphabet-linking activity (alphabet chants, songs; letter–sound games; etc.) • Define new vocabulary words
Plan (1–2 minutes)	• Engage in conversation to plan the text • Use focused talk to establish a purpose for writing • Build an oral text that teachers and children can expand and share
Write (4 minutes)	• Compose and construct the text • Think about the message and audience • Listen for specific sounds in words • Form words or phrases • Connect letter names with the sounds they represent • Attend to the details of forming letters
Reread/revise (1 minute)	• Reread words or groups of words after each addition to the text • Suggest revisions to clarify the meaning • Recognize the importance of conventions
Wrap-up (1 minute)	• Do shared reading of completed text • Discuss ways to apply new understandings to future writing

Individualized guidance

One disadvantage of my study was that I was not the classroom teacher and therefore did not get to observe the children working on reading and writing projects throughout the day. Despite my limited time with the children each day, the format of interactive writing allowed me to quickly recognize each child's literacy strengths and struggles.

I was able to use this information during my instruction to individualize support. For example, I understood that Sally needed hand-over-hand assistance; with this scaffolding, she exuberantly bopped away from the writing project each time she contributed. I observed that Nathan had advanced alphabet knowledge and skills and could write full words with little support. I noticed that Juan called out letters to match sounds and was eager to contribute the letters in his name when they appeared in our projects.

I was reminded of how important it is to observe and document the children's different comfort levels with writing so I could make these unscripted instructional decisions during each lesson to meet every student's needs.

Preschool children differ in their abilities to contribute to the group text during interactive writing because of their widely varied personal experiences with early writing. While older children may be able to contribute a whole word or a group of words to the text, preschool children may need hand-over-hand assistance at the beginning of the year to form a single letter, or they may be able to write a few familiar letters independently.

It is essential for teachers to observe children during independent writing time so they can make informed decisions about when to invite children to share the pen. For example, if Madeleine's teacher sees her writing her name during center time, it would make sense to ask Madeleine to write the M in the word Morning during the interactive writing lesson. If Joey's teacher observes him using scribble units to compose a letter to a friend, it may be helpful to invite Joey to contribute a letter, such as a lowercase *l*, that is undemanding for an emergent writer to form.

Regardless of each child's current writing ability, it is crucial for teachers to involve all children in the writing process each day. For preschool interactive writing lessons that include writing only four or five words each day, it is helpful to invite at least two students to aid in writing each word for maximum participation and engagement.

Conclusion

Interactive writing is a powerful way to introduce preschool children to the meaning-making processes involved in writing (Hall et al. 2015) while still practicing lower-level transcription skills in an authentic experience. To maximize the learning benefits for preschoolers, it is important to adapt the strategy to accommodate children's emerging fine motor skills, attention spans, and letter–sound knowledge. This can be done by conducting lessons with smaller groups, adjusting lesson length, providing alphabet-linking activities, and offering individualized support.

In my experience in the Head Start classrooms, the children quickly became familiar with the writing process as well as with letter names and formations for frequently used letters in the alphabet. The children responded favorably to the small group format, as it allowed for frequent interactions with the text, and they remained engaged due to group participation activities (e.g., writing letters in the air and on dry-erase boards). Although preschool children have differing levels of early literacy skills than primary-age children do, I found that with a few important adaptations, they were very excited by and successful at writing in an interactive setting.

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Gender Expression and Identity

Stephanie Feeney and Nancy K. Freeman, with Katie Schaffer

We are pleased to have guest editor Katie Schaffer's help in addressing this sensitive and timely issue. Katie brings extensive knowledge and insight regarding gender issues to this column.

The case

Four-year-old Michael usually comes to school in jeans and a T-shirt but always goes to the dress-up area as soon as he arrives and puts on a dress or skirt.

On the day his mother was volunteering in the classroom, he walked in and immediately put on a ballerina skirt and sparkly shoes. She firmly told him to take them off and instead put on the firefighter's hat and boots, try on the cowboy hat, or do "something that boys do." Michael complied with his mother's demand but soon left the dramatic play area.

When the children went outside to play, Michael's mother told Ana, Michael's teacher, that he consistently plays female roles at home and shows little interest in toys and activities typically associated with boys. She and her husband were very concerned about his behavior, and she asked Ana not to allow Michael to play with any "girl stuff" at school.

Ana also has observed that Michael strongly prefers playing with girls and chooses activities that are stereotypically feminine, like having tea parties and wearing dress-up clothes that have lots of ribbons and sequins. He also frequently tells the other children that he is really a girl and that he wants to be called "Michelle."

Ana knows that some children begin to persistently identify with a gender different from their assigned sex at a very young age (Ehrensaft 2011; Fox 2015). (See "Glossary of Terms" for definitions of words and phrases used in this column.) She is also aware that the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct strongly supports maintaining close, collaborative relationships with families and respecting their child-rearing and cultural preferences. What is her most ethical response?

Responding to the issue

This scenario is similar to the one described in the Focus on Ethics column "Don't Let My Son Dress Up as a Girl!" in the September 2017 issue of *Young Children*. In both cases, there is a conflict between a family's request that its son not be allowed to engage in stereotypically feminine activities in school and a teacher's belief that it is best for children to be encouraged to choose the activities that are most meaningful to them.

> Our role as educators is to create a safe and reflective space for children to develop their identities and to counterbalance gender stereotypes.

Despite the similarities, there are some important differences between these two scenarios. Like Victor (the child described in the September 2017 column), many boys are fascinated by glittery clothing and enjoy playing a variety of roles—including feminine ones—in the dramatic play area. Michael's interest in "girl stuff," however, is not limited to playing with clothes and roles. Michael consistently gravitates to female-assigned pursuits, identifies as a girl, and asks to be called by a girl's name. These are examples of how Michael's *gender expression* (how a person shows their gender to the world through external choices) is currently *gender nonconforming* (it does not follow prevailing cultural and social expectations about what is appropriate for their gender).

Michael may be—or ultimately identify as—*trans* or *transgender* (a person whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned at birth).

While there is nothing new about gender nonconforming behavior in early childhood settings, advice for how educators can best handle conflicting perspectives has been scarce or absent, and resources to help teachers work with children and their families on this issue have not been readily available (Kilman 2013).

As in previous columns, we will use the process described in *Ethics and the Early Childhood Educator* (Feeney & Freeman 2018) to systematically apply the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2011) to this situation. We will then consider the unique challenges presented by this case and explore some resources that might be helpful to teachers and administrators who are working with children like Michael and their families.

Our analysis is informed by contributions from students in the ECE 200, The Professional in Early Childhood Education, class at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon; participants at the June 2018 NAEYC Professional Learning Institute in Austin, Texas; Briel Schmitz, head of Spruce Street School in Seattle, Washington; and Rabbi Meir Muller, assistant professor of early childhood education at the University of South Carolina and head of Cutler Jewish Day School in Columbia, South Carolina. We thank them for contributing to this analysis.

Analysis

We begin with the first two steps of the process we use to address a workplace issue.

Identify the problem and determine if it involves ethics

This situation involves ethics because Ana must decide the right course of action to support a gender nonconforming or trans child and the child's concerned family.

Determine if it is an ethical responsibility or an ethical dilemma

While we noticed similarities between Michael and Victor (from our 2017 column), we came to

Glossary of Terms

Assigned sex: The label given at birth—usually *male* or *female*—based on a variety of factors (usually genitalia, but sometimes also hormones and chromosomes). The term *assigned at birth* acknowledges that someone (often a doctor) is making a decision but there is far more biological, anatomical, and chromosomal variation than captured by the binary labels of *male* and *female*.

Gender: A social construct that categorizes and labels societal and cultural expectations (i.e., gender norms) for how people of different assigned sexes (and thus assigned genders) are supposed to act. Gender varies over time and from place to place.

Gender identity: How a person self-identifies their gender, which may include *man*, *woman*, *genderqueer*, or other gender identities. A person's understanding of their gender identity can begin as early as age 2.

Gender expression: The way in which a person expresses their gender identity, typically through their appearance, affect, behavior, and activities.

Gender nonconforming: A term to describe a person whose behavior or appearance does not follow prevailing cultural and social expectations about what is appropriate to their assigned gender (and thus assigned sex). Some people who position their gender outside of a man/woman binary describe their gender as *gender nonconforming* or *genderqueer*.

Trans or transgender: A self-identification of a person whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex. For example, someone who was assigned female at birth but identifies as male might use the term *transman*.

Cis or cisgender: A person whose gender identity is the same as their assigned sex. For example, if the doctor said "It's a boy," and the child continues to identify as a boy/man, then he is *cis* or a *cisman*. People who are not trans are, therefore, cis.

Queer: A term that allows individuals to avoid the rigid categorization of *straight* and *gay*, and can indicate an attraction to people of many genders. For some, queer is also a political statement, expressing rejection of binary thinking and asserting that sexual orientation and gender identity are complex and potentially fluid. Although historically a derogatory term, *queer* has been reclaimed by many communities to have a positive connotation.

Sexuality: Sexuality is not just about sex. It is about individuals' bodies, genders, feelings, relationships, and ways of experiencing intimacy. In this context, children's healthy sexual development involves learning about their bodies, feelings, and relationships. Sexuality can also refer to sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions, and preferences. Sexual orientation often refers to whom we are sexually attracted. Some common terms for sexuality include *bi* (or *bisexual*), *gay*, *straight*, and *queer*.

appreciate that Ana faced a more challenging situation than Victor's teacher. She needed to respect Michael's preferences while working effectively and sensitively with his parents.

After presenting the scenario to two groups of early childhood educators and doing some research and reflection, we came to the conclusion that Ana is facing an ethical responsibility (a situation with just one morally justified course of action), not an ethical dilemma (a situation for which there is more than one possible resolution, which can be justified in moral terms). Because we consider it an ethical responsibility to respect children's gender self-determination, we will refer to Michael using her chosen name, Michelle, and chosen gender pronouns, she/her, for the remainder of the article.

Guidance from the NAEYC Code

Let's look at the guidance the NAEYC Code provides for this decision.

The groups who discussed this situation both concluded that they could not justify forbidding a child to behave in ways that express her strongly held sense of self and that, therefore, they could not comply with this family's request to keep her from activities associated with girls or femininity. They agreed that Ana's primary responsibility was to Michelle, and that she needed to honor Michelle's ways of expressing her identity. The groups also emphasized the importance of Ana listening carefully to the family's concerns and treating them with understanding and respect.

Some noted that Ana might feel she lacks the expertise to respond confidently to this situation. They recommended that she work closely with her director and seek out other knowledgeable professionals. Together, they could help her prepare to share information about young children's developing gender identity with Michelle's family, helping them understand their child's request to be identified as a girl and to engage in play that she finds meaningful. For suggestions on how to engage families and respond to some of their concerns, see "Practical Guidance for Teachers: Supporting the Families of Gender Nonconforming Children" on pages 91–93. It would also be important that Ana and the director work with the program's other teachers and families to help them accept Michelle's gender identity with kindness and understanding.

The Code's Core Values, Ideals, and Principles

Respondents to this case found that the Code's Core Values, Ideals, and Principles offered guidance that would help Ana address this family's concerns. They noted, in particular, educators' responsibilities to children and the importance of nurturing positive relationships with families. The following excerpts from the Code are those most applicable to this situation.

Core Values

- Base our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn
- Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family
- Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague)
- Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect

Ideals

I-1.2—To base program practices upon current knowledge and research in the field of early childhood education, child development, and related disciplines, as well as on particular knowledge of each child.

I-1.3—To recognize and respect the unique qualities, abilities, and potential of each child.

I-1.5—To create and maintain safe and healthy settings that foster children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development and that respect their dignity and their contributions.

I-2.2—To develop relationships of mutual trust and create partnerships with the families we serve.

I-2.5—To respect the dignity and preferences of each family and to make an effort to learn about its structure, culture, language, customs, and beliefs.

I-2.6—To acknowledge families' childrearing values and their right to make decisions for their children.

I-2.8—To help family members enhance their understanding of their children . . . and support family members in the continuing development of their skills as parents.

Principles

P-1.1—Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. ***This principle has precedence over all others in this Code.***

P-1.4—We shall use two-way communications to involve all those with relevant knowledge (including families and staff) in decisions concerning a child, as appropriate, ensuring confidentiality of sensitive information.

P-2.4—We shall ensure that the family is involved in significant decisions affecting their child.

P-2.6—As families share information with us about their children and families, we shall ensure that families' input is an important contribution to the planning and implementation of the program.

The Code offers strong justification for a teacher to base her actions on the needs of the child and for honoring the family's childrearing values and agreeing to their request. However, the Code also points educators toward putting the wellbeing of the child above all other concerns. P-1.1 takes precedence over all other items in the Code and supports Ana's decision to place the highest priority on the best interests of the child.

Guidance for the director

These items from the Code's Supplement for Program Administrators (2011) provide additional guidance for the director who is helping Ana address this issue:

P-1.1—We shall place the welfare and safety of children above other obligations (for example, to families, program personnel, employing agency, community). ***This item takes precedence over all others in this Supplement.***

I-2.2—To serve as a resource for families by providing information and referrals to services in the larger community.

P-2.10—We shall respond to families' requests to the extent that the requests are congruent with program philosophy, standards of good practice, and the resources of the program. We shall not honor any request that puts a child in a situation that would create physical or emotional harm. In such instances, we shall communicate with the family the reason(s) why the request was not honored and work toward an alternative solution.

Reflecting on the case

Gender curiosity in children is not a recent phenomenon. Young children have always engaged in various forms of gender play, exploration, and identification. However, in recent years there has been greater recognition of the range of ways that individuals can express their gender identity and significantly more representation of trans people and communities in mainstream media. While this has opened up space for conversations about gender nonconforming and trans-identified children, some adults (including some educators, parents, grandparents) still attempt to stop the behavior (as in the case of Michelle's parents) or attempt to rigidly categorize the behavior (assuming they can predict the child's ultimate identity).

› Continued on page 89

Resources for Teachers and Families

Books and articles for adults

Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children. Diane Ehrensaft (2011). This developmental and clinical psychologist provides clear advice about supporting children who do not conform to society's narrowly defined gender categories.

The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals. Stephanie Brill & Rachel Pepper (2008). A comprehensive resource with information to help adults guide gender-variant and transgender children.

This Is How It Always Is: A Novel. Laurie Frankel (2017). A family's journey of learning and acceptance begins when their 3-year-old son announces that he wants to be a girl when he grows up.

"Tate and the Pink Coat: Exploring Gender and Enacting Anti-Bias Principles." Janice Kroeger, Abigail E. Recker, and Alexandra C. Gunn. 2019. This article presents current research on the importance of gender inclusivity in early childhood classrooms and offers practical tips to help teachers support children's explorations of gender. NAEYC.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2019/exploring-gender-enacting-anti-bias

Websites

Gender Spectrum. This website has links to resources that help programs create gender-sensitive and inclusive environments for all children. Includes resources for children, families, and teachers, and training materials addressing a wide range of topics. www.genderspectrum.org

Teaching Tolerance. This website contains resources for educators committed to diversity, equity, and justice, including classroom and professional development materials focused on race and ethnicity, religion, ability, class, immigration, gender and sexual identity, bullying, and bias. www.tolerance.org/topics

Gender Justice in Early Childhood. This website focuses specifically on young children and offers resources and links to help educators consider their language, teaching practices, and programs from a gender justice perspective. www.genderjusticeinearlychildhood.com

Children's books

The Boy & the Bindi, by Vivek Shraya, illus. by Rajni Perera (2016). (Ages 4–8) A 5 year-old South Asian boy is fascinated with his mother's bindi, the colored dot commonly worn in the middle of Hindu women's foreheads. He wants to have one of his own. His mother agrees and teaches him about its cultural significance.

Elena's Serenade, by Campbell Gleeson (2014). (Ages 3–8) A young Mexican girl admires her father's glassblowing and wants to follow in his footsteps. However, pointing to her size and gender, he disapproves of her aspirations. She disguises herself as a boy to learn the craft and ultimately changes her father's views. Told in both English and Spanish, the story explores the limiting nature of gender roles and the power of children to challenge adult thinking.

Introducing Teddy, by Jessica Walton, illus. by Dougal MacPherson (2016). (Ages 3–6) Errol and his teddy bear, Thomas, are best friends who do everything together. One day, Thomas tells Errol, "In my heart, I've always known that I'm a girl teddy, not a boy teddy." Errol replies, "I don't care if you're a girl teddy or a boy teddy! What matters is that you are my friend."

Julián Is a Mermaid, by Jessica Love (2018). (Ages 4–8) Inspired by women he sees on the subway who are colorfully dressed as mermaids, Julián dresses up like a mermaid when he gets home. He worries about how his grandmother will respond, but she celebrates his transformation.

My Princess Boy, by Cheryl Kilodavis, illus. by Suzanne DeSimone (2009). (Ages 4–8) This story is told from the perspective of the mother of a 4-year-old boy who likes to wear dresses and enjoys things that typically appeal to girls.

Sparkle Boy, by Lesléa Newman, illus. by Maria Mola (2017). (Ages 4–8) Casey loves blocks, puzzles, and his dump truck, but he also wants to try out the shimmer skirt, glittery nails, and bracelets his sister and his grandmother wear. The adults in his life support his choices, but he worries when older boys tease him.

It is important to note that in US society today, children who are assigned male at birth receive more intense gender scrutiny than children who are assigned female at birth. For instance, girls are often encouraged by their parents to explore and participate in games traditionally associated with boys. These children are often celebrated as "strong" and "independent." However, when boys express interests in activities associated with girls, they are typically reprimanded, ostracized, or identified as problematic. This double standard stems from a culture that often demeans behavior associated with women and femininity.

This case warrants particularly careful consideration because of the potential lifelong consequences of respecting or refusing to respect Michelle's view of herself. It is important that the adults in Michelle's life be willing to honor who she says she is. Denying children the opportunity to express themselves by forcing them to accept adults' views of gender-appropriate behavior is likely to damage relationships and the children's sense of self, in addition to making their lives more difficult.

Teachers working with families who are concerned about how their children are expressing their gender identity need to be flexible and well prepared. It may be helpful to refresh their knowledge of child development, specifically identity development as it relates to concepts of gender. Gender is varied and dynamic. All of us express our gender differently over the course of our lives; children should be encouraged and supported to play, explore, and define the gender that feels right to them at the time (without an expectation of day-to-day or month-to-month consistency). Our role as educators is to create a safe and reflective space for children to develop their interests and identities and to counterbalance pervasive gender stereotypes.

Flexibility and preparation are also essential for supporting families. The most important thing that a teacher or director can do with families is listen carefully and try to understand their concerns. Some families may be worried about their children's future school experiences during their middle childhood and teen years. They may be seeking assurance that their children will be safe, happy, and well adjusted. Other families may be interested in knowing if there is research that indicates that a transgender child can grow into a confident and well-adjusted adult. Families with strong religious or cultural beliefs that do not support gender nonconformity need to feel that their perspectives are being heard.

Teachers also need to have appropriate resources in mind for families, knowing that different families will be best supported in different ways. Some will be interested in reading scientific literature; others may just need someone to listen to and reassure them. At times, it may be appropriate to refer the family to a community resource person who is skilled in addressing questions of gender and sexual expression.

It may be helpful to remind family members that the ultimate goal is preserving their positive long-term relationships with their child. By sharing current information on child development, teachers may point out that there are things about the child that the family can neither change nor control. While they can't change their child's gender identity, they do have the power to strengthen the relationship by being loving and supportive no matter how their child self-identifies. (For more specifics to help you work effectively with families, see pages 91–93.)

As we pointed out in our September 2017 column about a father's disapproval of his son dressing up in girl's clothing, many child-rearing values are strongly rooted in families' cultural beliefs. Sensitive teachers must carefully balance their responsibilities to children and to their families—this can be particularly challenging when working with groups that have strong positions about appropriate gender roles. Additional challenges arise when a child's gender

preference is at odds with their family culture and values. Those situations will call for exceptional cultural navigation skills and, most likely, additional support from experts and organizations in the community. We anticipate that this topic will continue to be addressed in early childhood education.

As a teacher, you have the ability to make the world a better place for children who are gender nonconforming, are gender creative, or identify as trans. One place to start is with an inclusive classroom that supports a variety of gender expressions and avoids perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes. There are simple ways to make classrooms more inclusive, like avoiding consistently dividing children into groups by gender. For example, think about how you call children to the door. Instead of calling boys, then girls, to line up at the door, you might ask children wearing red, then blue, then green, to get ready to go outside. You can incorporate pictures, books, and dress-up materials that avoid gender stereotypes into the classroom. And you can help children move beyond traditional gender roles by encouraging girls to pretend they are firefighters and boys to role-play as nurses. If possible, make your restrooms available to all genders. Respond to children's fears, teach children to stand up for themselves if teased for their gender expressions, and validate their gender identities as they choose to express them. Strive to help all the children and adults in your program embrace a more inclusive, less restrictive view of gender.

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Nancy K. Freeman, PhD, is professor emerita of early childhood education at the University of South Carolina, in Columbia. She has served as president of the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE) and was on its board for many years. Nancy has written extensively on professional ethics and has been involved in the NAEYC Code's revisions and the development of its supplements. Nancy is coauthor of *Ethics and the Early Childhood Educator* and of *Teaching the Code of Ethical Conduct: A Resource Guide*. nkfusc@gmail.com

Katie Schaffer, BA, is a white, cis, queer woman dedicated to collectively envisioning and implementing liberatory educational practices. For the past six years, Katie has worked at the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute. Finding a dearth of teacher education courses or professional development opportunities on gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ families in early childhood settings, Katie has created a training series and built out a facilitation team that has provided support to preschools and child care centers across New York City.

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Practical Guidance for Teachers

Supporting the Families of Gender Nonconforming Children

By Katie Schaffer

In "Focus on Ethics: Gender Expression and Identity," Stephanie Feeney, Nancy K. Freeman, and I explore the case of a 4-year-old child assigned male at birth who asks to be called Michelle and to be referred to as a girl, and her teacher's ethical responsibility to support Michelle despite her family's request that she not be allowed to play with "girl stuff." While that article offers ethical guidance, many teachers may be interested in practical guidance on engaging with families who are concerned about their child's gender expression. As a queer educator and the creator of a training series on gender and sexuality in early childhood education, I will lay out some frameworks for those conversations here.

It is critical to say up front that families will have very different feelings given their other experiences, identities, communities, and histories of access or marginalization. For families who have experienced racism or other forms of interpersonal and institutional violence, fears for their child's safety may be at the forefront. For families who are part of conservative religious communities, social acceptance may be of greatest concern. Recognizing the complexity of interactions between educators and families, this article provides a set of strategies for opening up conversations and offering support when children's gender identity or expression do not conform to their families' expectations.

Be curious

As a teacher supporting a young child exploring their gender, you may wince at a family's resistance, feel torn between the child's needs and the family's requests, or be unsure or anxious. Given these active feelings—both yours and the family's—it may be tempting to assume you already know what the family is thinking. It is worth, however, staying open-minded and having an exploratory conversation.

Having worked with many families, I've found that it's impossible to predict what feelings (or fears) are driving a family's response. They may be concerned about social ostracism or bullying, uncertain what response is in the best interest of their child, or fearful of grandparents' reactions. Given the depth of what we do not know in these situations, it's important to carve out time to talk with the adults who care for and love the child. While there may be an emotional moment that sparks this conversation—like Michelle's parent expressing alarm about her wearing a dress in the play corner—try to find a time to talk when everyone can come to the discussion level-headed. Below are some questions you can use to open this conversation.

Questions you might ask family members:

1. What do you like about your child? What excites you about your child? When do you see your child experiencing joy?
2. It sounds like you are concerned about how your child is thinking about under. What worries you?
3. What are your hopes for your child—this year, next year, as an adult?
4. What are your hopes for your relationship with your child?
5. What are some ways to address your concerns? What support do you need? What support may your child need? Who else could be brought into this conversation?

These are simply opening questions. Make sure you are reflecting back the family members' feelings and concerns and asking follow-up questions. For example, if a family member responds to the second question by saying "It's just not normal," be prepared to dig a little. You could ask, "What's your concern about your child not being 'normal'? What worries you about that?" If the family member says that they hope their child will be a "good man," find out more: is this desire about maintaining the family's connection to their community, wanting the child to have a family of their own, or something else?

The goal of this series of questions is to elicit family members' concerns and then help them assess the kind of help they need to be the best possible support for their child. (Usually the adults need much more support than their child does!) By asking the family to think through what they hope for their child, you orient them away from fear and toward a more expansive and caring vision for their child.

Engage hopes and fears

You will want to engage specifically with the hopes and fears raised by family members. The following are the most common questions I hear while working with families, and the responses I offer.

1. Will my child be ostracized by our family or community?

We don't know. There may be family or community members who struggle to accept your child's gender identity or expression, but there will be many people who support them, and you can play a powerful role in building a supportive community for your child.

2. Will my child struggle or experience violence because of their gender identity or expression?

Homophobia and transphobia are real and can lead to bias or violence. They can also intersect with other forms of bias, including racism and misogyny. However, many queer and trans people not only survive but thrive, building loving communities and families. As a family member or caregiver, you have a critical role to play in helping your child build these early networks and develop the resilience that comes from a deep well of support and familial love.

3. Will my child be able to have a family of their own?

Yes. Your child—regardless of gender or sexuality—can have a family, including a partner and children. Of course, we cannot predetermine our children's futures, and they may or may not fulfill the specific visions we have for them. (Whether queer, trans, straight, or cis, your child may or may not wear a white wedding dress!)

4. Will my child be happy?

We all have complex lives and emotional experiences, and your child will move through some hardships as part of life. But being queer or trans will not preclude your child from happiness, and may also open up new communities that are joyful and sustaining.

5. Is my child violating our religious convictions?

Many spiritual and religious traditions have a celebrated role for trans or two-spirit people. However, families whose religious traditions have specific prescriptions for "men" and "women" may struggle with any diverging ideas about gender. As an educator, this is a hard place to provide specific counsel, but you can speak to the value of love (if you feel comfortable) and encourage consultation with others. Ask the family member who in their religious community may be able to support them in celebrating their child.

6. Did I do something wrong as a parent or caregiver?

No. Identity is complex and multifaceted. Think of all the ways that your child has opinions, tendencies, and personality traits that are very much their own. We can support our children, but we also need to let go of a sense that they are a reflection of us. When a child is gender nonconforming or trans, it is often a family member who considered themselves of the same gender as the child (i.e., the father of a trans girl) who struggles the most, in part because the child's gender identity or expression can feel like a rejection of that family member.

7. Is my child sick?

No. There is nothing wrong with your child exploring gender, identifying with a gender different from the one assigned at birth, or "doing" their gender differently than their families expect. The binary concept of gender—the idea that there are only two genders—is a social construct that is not based in science and is not accepted by all cultures. Instead of pathologizing your child's identity, it can be helpful to ask, "How is my child doing?" Are they happy? Playful? Curious? If so, how can we continue to support their positive development (even if their gender feels new to us)? If not, what can we do to support them? If your child is being teased, let's figure out how to address that. If your child wants to be referred to by a different name or gender pronoun, consider how to best support their emerging identity.

Provide child development context

At 3 years old, children are developing a sense of their own gender. However, we do not know the endpoint of their identities, and must recognize that all of us will experience and engage with our gender differently over the course of our lives. This acknowledgement should not lead us to discount children's self-identification—we should be respectful of it and take them seriously—but we should not expect that their identity is immutable. For all of us, gender identity and expression are lifelong endeavors.

Pretend play is key to children's social, cognitive, linguistic, and emotional development. Through pretend play, children learn about themselves and others, develop problem solving and other cognitive strategies, engage creativity, and heighten social and emotional development. When one or more parents of children in a particular classroom are pregnant, for example, we may see an increase in "pregnancy play" as children—regardless of gender—explore what it means to be pregnant. We should encourage these explorations, but we should also notice when a child more persistently claims a particular identity.

Ultimately, while we can control whether we react to children with love or shame, we cannot dictate children's identities. We can support children to develop an expansive sense of themselves, provide language to give voice to different experiences, and support them through play and conversation.

Use resources and engage support

As an educator, you can provide resources that speak to the family's underlying fears, as well as books and media with a range of gender representations. You can help families think through how to engage with these texts to support their child. Additionally, you can discuss with families how the school can support them and their child, which may include inclusive picture books, discussions of family structures, and more. (For more resources, see "Resources for Teachers and Families" on on page 88.)

Here are a few books I often recommend for adults (items 1–3) and for children (items 4–6).

1. *The Bold World: A Memoir of Family and Transformation*, by Jodie Patterson (2019)
2. *Raising the Transgender Child: A Complete Guide for Parents, Families and Caregivers*, by Michele Angello and Ali Bowman (2016)
3. *The Gender Creative Child: Pathways for Nurturing and Supporting Children Who Live Outside Gender Boxes*, by Diane Ehrensaft (2016)
4. *Who Are You? The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity*, by Brook Pessin-Whedbee, illus. by Naomi Bardoff (2016)
5. *When Aiden Became a Brother*, by Kyle Lukoff, illus. by Kaylani Juanita (2019)
6. *They She He Me: Free to Be!*, by Maya Gonzalez and Matthew Smith-Gonzalez (2017)

Be generous with yourself

You may be compassionate and supportive, and a family may still be angry or transfer their child to a different school. The stronger your pre-existing relationships with parents, families, and the larger school community, the easier this work will be. Continue to build connections, provide supportive space for children, and acknowledge the larger social, cultural, and political structures that make raising children—particularly those with marginalized identities—a challenge.

About the author

Katie Schaffer, BA, is a white, cis, queer woman dedicated to collectively envisioning and implementing liberatory educational practices. For the past seven years, Katie has worked at the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute. Finding a dearth of teacher education courses or professional development opportunities on gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ families in early childhood settings, Katie has created a training series and built out a facilitation team that has provided support to preschools and daycare centers across New York City and New York State.

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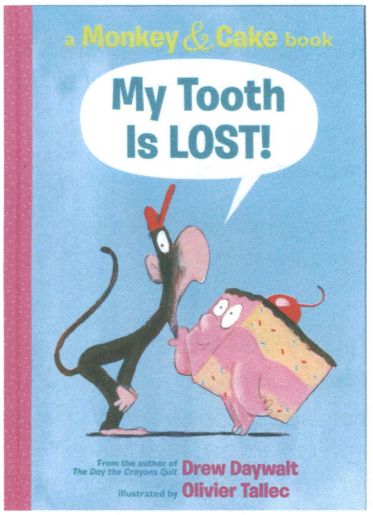
The Reading Chair

New children's books too good to miss and one forever favorite

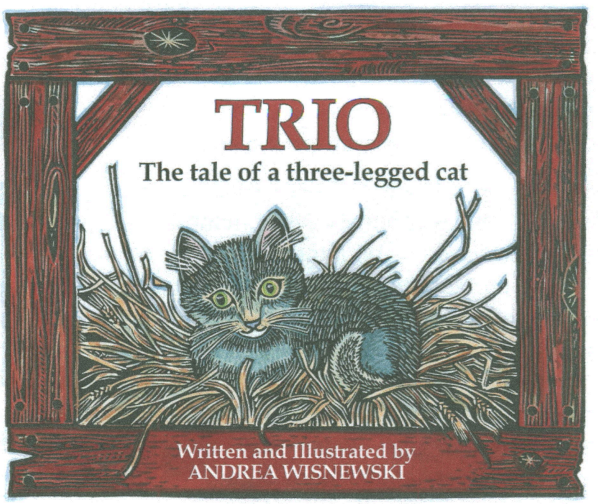


My Tooth Is LOST!: A Monkey & Cake Book

By Drew Daywalt. Illus. by Olivier Tallec. 2019. New York: Orchard Books. 56 pp. Ages 3 to 7.

In this absurd and humorous story about friendship (part of an early reader series), Cake helps its good friend Monkey understand what it means to lose a tooth. It can be hard to reach this childhood milestone, both physically and emotionally. Yet in this tale, the magic of the tooth fairy—borne of myths and legends from civilizations throughout history—offers reassurance and delight.

Young children will enjoy the book at story time, and many who are newly toothless will be able to tackle this read on their own. Uncluttered, colorful illustrations are full of expression and feeling. This book comes from the same author as *The Day the Crayons Quit*.



Trio: The Tale of a Three-Legged Cat

By Andrea Wisnewski. 2017. Boston: David R. Godine. 40 pp. Ages 3 to 7.

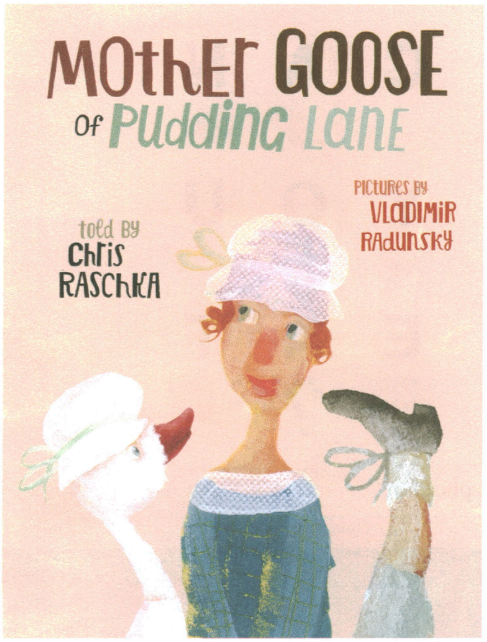
Trio was born into a litter of four kittens. He has three legs—unlike his siblings who have four—but he doesn't feel any different. Some things are more challenging for him, but Trio finds a way. He even keeps up with the chickens. Trio's curiosity and imagination get him into all sorts of trouble and fun. But one thing Trio can't do is lay an egg. Or can he? With Trio's drive and can-do attitude, he lives a full life.

The book's illustrations are made from beautiful woodcuts. The charming and uncluttered designs pop off the page. Based on a true story.

About the authors

Isabel Baker, MAT, MLS, is president of The Book Vine for Children, a national company dedicated to getting good books into the hands of preschool children and their teachers. Isabel has worked as a children's librarian and is currently a presenter on early literacy and book selection.

Miriam Baker Schiffer, MFA, is a writer in Brooklyn, New York. She consults on book selections for The Book Vine, in McHenry, Illinois. Miriam's children's book, *Stella Brings the Family,* was published by Chronicle Books in 2015.



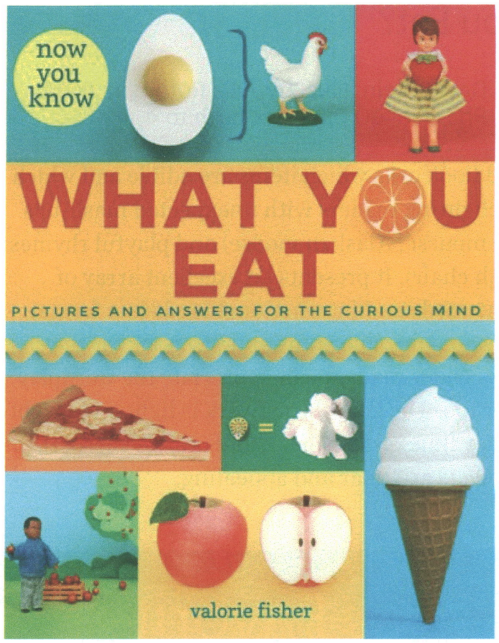
Mother Goose of Pudding Lane

By Chris Raschka. Illus. by Vladimir Radunsky. 2019. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. 48 pp. Ages 2 to 8.

Mother Goose has endured for over 300 years, providing entertainment and highlighting the value of rhyme, rhythm, pacing, predictive text, and rich vocabulary. Mother Goose's rhymes give realistic takes on everyday life. They promote young children's literacy skills and provide a common bond to readers who recite them together.

Mother Goose feels timeless, but a fresh interpretation is always a pleasure. Here, award-winning author and artist Chris Raschka presents the rhymes within the life story of one of their fabled creators, Elizabeth Goose, a mother and stepmother of 14 children in the 1600s.

Vladimir Radunsky's illustrations offer much more than the quaint "polite girls in bonnets" we tend to see in Mother Goose tomes. Radunsky's playful and punchy pictures are true to the period (the dress, the architecture), yet contemporary and fun.



Now You Know What You Eat

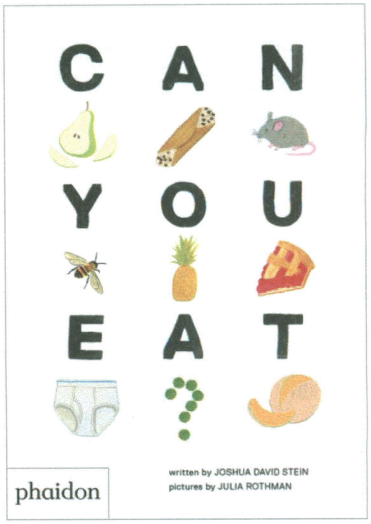
By Valorie Fisher. 2019. New York: Orchard Books. 40 pp. Ages 3 to 8.

This ingenious food science book for children is a feast. If readers ever wondered how their favorite foods are made—from ice cream to dill pickles to maple syrup to mac and cheese—this book has the answers. Each food's origin story is presented through clean and appealing graphics that blend recipes and mathematics. Each page offers something unexpected: the various animals all over the world that are relied on for milk, the scientific process through which corn kernels pop, and the way cacao beans become a bar of chocolate.

By learning how foods are processed and created, children will be able to make better informed choices about what to eat. At the end of the book, readers see how to apportion foods on their plates to make a balanced meal. They learn which foods contain which vitamins and minerals, and which of those provide a boost to various parts of the body such as the eyes, muscles, and heart. A "Words to Know" section at the back covers terms from *bacteria* to *curdle* to *pollination*. Young readers will want to pour their attention into this visually delightful, chock-full food book.

Can You Eat?

By Joshua David Stein. Illus. by Julia Rothman. 2019. New York: Phaidon. 30 pp. Ages birth to 4.



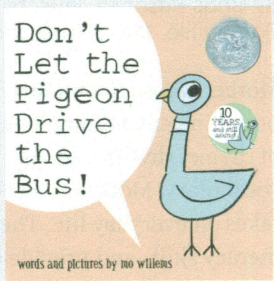
This board book asks which items are edible and which are not, delighting readers with unexpected mash-ups (chocolate mousse, Alaskan moose) and playful rhymes (éclair, high chair). It presents an excellent array of vocabulary words and international foods in a format that makes an enjoyable point-and-say book for the very young. Older readers will appreciate the wordplay and humor too. The gouache artwork is light and bright (imagine key lime, prickly pear, and orange sherbet), and the objects are clear and appealing.

Forever Favorites

In each issue we feature a classic book to (re)introduce teachers to old favorites. This time, it comes with a new title too.

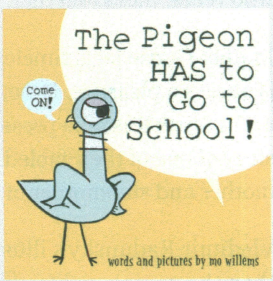
Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!

By Mo Willems. 2003. New York: Hyperion Books for Children. 40 pp. Ages 2 to 5.



The Pigeon HAS to Go to School!

By Mo Willems. 2019. New York: Hyperion Books for Children. 40 pp. Ages 2 to 6.



Mo Willems' Pigeon is our favorite obstinate toddler. Originally published over 15 years ago, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* is a perfect preschool book. Young readers identify with the frustrated pigeon, whose desires to drive the bus are thwarted by rules. He is an eternal optimist, much like a child. And yet, young readers also delight when his over-the-top antics get him nowhere and the rules remain in force.

The brand new *The Pigeon HAS to Go to School!* has the same rhythm and outrageousness as its predecessor. But this time, the drama focuses on Pigeon's fear of school. This book has new depth, for Pigeon isn't just frustrated; he's scared. Willems shows incredible emotion and attitude in very few lines of text. He taps into children's vulnerabilities, but for all the tension he creates, he diffuses it with humor. In a light moment at the end, Pigeon finds something to love: the yellow bus that comes to pick him up. Vehicle-obsessed preschoolers intuitively understand what a rewarding twist this is. For those who know the original book, the ending will be that much funnier.

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